

'Dumb' role, smart career

BY LISA ARCELLA

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Jeff Daniels has been in serious films like "The Hours" and "Terms of Endearment," but he says he'll always be remembered as the stupid sidekick in a classic Jim Carrey comedy.

"The guy on the toilet in 'Dumb & Dumber. It will be on my tombstone," a laughing Daniels tells the Daily News.

"There were people who told me I would end my career by doing that movie, but my agent said I should do it if I wanted to shake things up," adds the versatile actor, who stars this week in a TV remake of "The Goodbye Girl."

"Clint Eastwood said that he had seen me in "2 Days in the Valley" and "Dumb & Dumber" and said, 'If you can do two things that different,

you can do anything.' He cast me as a killer in "Blood Work."

So what about that long-rumored "Dumb & Dumber" sequel? (A prequel, "Dumb & Dumberer: When Harry Met Lloyd" was released last year.)

Daniels says if it comes together, count him in.

"I loved working with Jim, and at the end of the day, it makes people laugh. It's equal to anything else I have ever done," adds the actor, who, in spite of living in a tiny town in Michigan, has managed to have a successful, 20-year movie career.

In "The Goodbye Girl" remake, airing Friday on TNT, Daniels plays struggling New York actor Elliot — the 1977 role that won Richard Dreyfuss an Oscar.

Patricia Heaton from "Everybody Loves Raymond" steps into Marsha Mason's shoes to play Paula, the washed-up, divorced dancer with a precocious daughter.

Daniels, who turns 49 next month, made his mark in "Terms of Endearment" (1983), playing Debra Winger's hapless straying husband, Flap.

He followed that with Woody Allen's "The Purple Rose of Cairo" (1985), which he names as one of his favorite roles — he even named his hometown theater company after the flick. In the movie-within-a-movie, Daniels plays the dashing hero who pops off the theater screen to woo film fan Cecilia, played by Mia Farrow.

"Something Wild" (1986) featured Daniels — the stuck-in-a-rut businessman jolted out of his humdrum life by the wild and sexy Lulu, played by Melanie Griffith — handcuffed to a bed in one particularly unleashed scene.

Daniels — who's been married nearly 25 years and has 3 children — moved to New York City to pursue acting at the age of 21. And he says he still misses "everything about the city, the delis and diners. It's hard to get a good bagel in Chelsea, Mich.

"But I also just love the streets. One of my favorite times was when it would snow and you could walk through the streets.

"I know it's a very Woody Allen vision, but I think it can be the most romantic place in the world to be."

