

BRIGHTLIGHTS

[Ted Boyke ('99)]

From Harrisonburg to Hollywood

BY JACQUELYN WALSH ('09)

With two young daughters and a gig working with animated films like *The Princess and the Frog*, it's hard not to be king of your household. But Ted Boyke ('99) takes it in stride.

As assistant technical director in the Layout Finaling Department with Disney's Feature Animation division in Los Angeles, Boyke adds lifelike animated details to the frames in animated films.

"It helps to have two little princesses in the house, my 5-year-old Molly and my 2-year-old Annie. They are big fans; I'm lucky I had the perfect target audience," Boyke says.

During his work on *The Princess and the Frog*, Boyke gave animators technical and artistic support. "I was really happy to be working on a hand-drawn movie," says Boyke, who traces his success back to his Madison Experience.

Toy Story, the film that set a new standard for animated feature films, was released in 1995, while Boyke was studying in the JMU School of Media Arts and Design. It was the first year that computer animation was offered at JMU. Boyke's concentration was in media writing with a minor in film studies.

Since its beginning, the computer animation program has grown, boasting JMU alumni who work for companies including PIXAR, Blizzard Entertainment, Square Enix, Reel FX, Big Idea, Metrolight Studios, Bethesda Softworks and many others,

says Peter Ratner, professor of art and creator of JMU's 3-D computer animation program. "The JMU program focuses a lot on digital and technical skills that help students obtain positions such as Ted's," adds Ratner. "Our animation students realize it takes dedication, creativity and patience to succeed."

JMU experiences outside the classroom also helped Boyke in his career. He was a

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film assistant at Grafton-Stovall Theatre for two years. He reviewed tons of movies and helped pick the features that students enjoyed. "*Pulp Fiction* was a really hot movie when I was working at Grafton-Stovall. We showed about four movies a week," says Boyke, who also was part of the JMU film club Gemini Entertainment, now called Cinemuse.



Disney Feature Animation film animator Ted Boyke ('99) took his JMU academic and extracurricular experiences to Hollywood and has worked on several blockbuster releases like 2010's *The Princess and the Frog*.

The club was originally founded to create student films. "It became a way for students to produce short films using university equipment," he says. "When students started Gemini they were actually able to get funds from the University Program Board, and that was key in affording the videotape, lights and various equipment. It was low-budget but UPB was very helpful."

The student film club piqued Boyke's interest in film work, he says, and he used the camera work and editing he did for the group as a resumé-booster. It helped land Boyke an internship with HBO Sports in Manhattan after graduation. "They loved that I had extracurricular activities on my resumé," says Boyke. "It was great. I got to work on featured boxing broadcasts and at the Goodwill Games. It was really cool having a backstage pass to those events."

When his internship ended, HBO wasn't hiring, so Boyke crashed at his parents' basement before heading to the West Coast with Ashley Laplante ('99), his future wife. "We decided to just go for it and head to California," he recalls. "We both wanted to be in the movie industry, and you really have to be in Los Angeles if you want to break in."

Boyke got a foot in the door by temping at companies and studios in Los Angeles. He worked on some music video projects and worked for a music law firm before landing a temp job with the Disney Feature Animation department. "Animation was something that I found out I liked after college," says Boyke, whose brother-in-law also is a JMU grad and works at Disney.

After a decade with Disney, Boyke has taken on projects in a variety of departments, worked nearly every shift possible and worked on 3-D aspects of movies. Once a film's animators draw the characters, Boyke and other technical directors assist them with scanning characters into a computer to begin the digital process.

"It is a really enjoyable experience. An animator draws one butterfly, and I scan it into the computer and use the software to make that one butterfly into a cloud of butterflies, all flap-

ping their wings at a different rate," says Boyke, who also worked on the 2010 Disney release *Tangled*, based on the German fairy tale *Rapunzel*.

"My Madison Experience was a really well-rounded college experience," adds Boyke. "The student clubs and activities I got involved in were just as instrumental in preparing me for my career as the academic classes." ■