

Life & Style

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Friends' hockey movie puts Wisconsin out front

By Jim Lundstrom
Post-Crescent staff writer

This is a story about friendship, obsession and hockey.

It starts with Erik Moe and Peter Rudy, two 30-something guys who work in advertising in California and who just wanted to see the Wisconsin high school hockey tournament.

"It really, sadly, is an obsession with us," Rudy said. "Erik and I played high school hockey in Madison. We played in college together at Lawrence (University). When we

moved to California, we held on to this obsession with small-town Wisconsin hockey programs."

The childhood friends wanted to return to Wisconsin in February 1999 for the high school hockey tourney.

"But for some reason," Rudy said, "our wives didn't think that was a very good vacation, and, so, we came up with this idea of 'What if we had an excuse to go back to Wisconsin?'"

The result of that Escape to Wisconsin idea is the award-winning comedy "No Sleep 'Til Madison," which comes out on DVD Tuesday.

At first the pair thought of creating a documentary, with the high school hockey tournament and the people who follow it as the subject matter.

They always had wanted to make a movie together. Moe and another lifelong friend, Ivo Knezevic, got the bug as youngsters when they filmed a "Rocky" parody called "Stony," which aired on the national TV show for children called "Kids World."

"We always knew we were going to work together, we just didn't know how," Knezevic said.

Rudy and Moe turned their thoughts to a movie that would feature the Wisconsin high school hockey tournament as a backdrop. For the starring role they came up with the consummate anti-hero, Owen Fenby, a 30-year-old emotionally stunted character who overorganizes an annual hockey tourney trip with some of his old high school buddies, all of whom are well adjusted compared to Owen.

Rudy and Moe, both of whom majored in English when they attended Lawrence in the mid-1980s, wrote the script in two months over the summer of 1999 in an office Moe had on the Universal Studios lot while he had a TV sitcom development deal.

"Our thought was to sell it and have someone else make it," Moe said. "But we both talked for a long time about doing a movie and we realized if ever we were going to make one, this was the one to make because only we would really understand it."

Once the story started coming along, the pair contacted Knezevic, who produces commercials for a Chicago ad agency and served as producer for "No Sleep."

Once they decided to shoot the film themselves, they formed a limited partnership and sold shares for \$10,000 apiece.

"Remember, this was the glorious '90s when the dot.coms were taking off and everyone was investing in any weird idea," Rudy said. "The Blair Witch Project' had just come out, this crappy-looking film that made \$60 million or something. So people all wanted to latch on to the next 'Blair Witch Project.'"

They also broke one of the cardinal rules of independent filmmaking by putting their own money into the project.

With that they raised enough to make the film.

Once the script was polished, they began thinking of the cast.

Moe had worked with actor Jim Gaffigan on a commercial ("The Ellen Show," "Three Kings," "Super Troopers"), so he showed him the script.

"He read the screenplay and said he'd love to do Owen," Rudy said.

"We were very fortunate in casting," Knezevic said. "Erik brought Jim to the party. I used some casting directors in Chicago. They came on board very early and really tapped into Second City and the comedy world. It really all comes down to casting and actors."

"From there it kind of snowballed," Rudy said. "The next thing we know, we're standing in this snowy field in Wisconsin with a crew and all these actors. 'What have we gotten ourselves into? Ohmygod!'"

They brought David Fleeer of Madison on board as third director. His ImageGate Films production company has produced ads for national clients, and Fleeer's documentary "What Does the Lady Do With Her Rage?" premiered at the 2003 Wisconsin Film Festival.

Knezevic said the production was fraught with problems.

"We were crazy for shooting in February in Wisconsin, but we didn't lose any days," he said.

"I've always wanted to make a movie about the making of the movie because that was 22 days of flying by the seat of our pants," Rudy said. "The snow melted halfway through the shoot. We left our film equipment on the road one day and drove away with \$50,000 worth of equipment sitting on the interstate. That was not a good one. Thank god a local farmer came by, picked it up and called us."

Getting the film into its final form took about another 18 months, Rudy said.

Still they were not done.

"Then you have to find a festival that will play it," Rudy said. "So it becomes another year of going around the country playing film festivals all over, trying to build some momentum until someone takes a chance on distributing it."

"No Sleep" debuted at the 2002 Wisconsin Film Festival in Madison, where it won Best Feature in the Wisconsin's Own category.

It also went on to win the prestigious Sundance Channel Emerging Filmmaker Award at the 2003 St. Louis International Film Festival, as well as Best Comedy and Audience Favorite at the 2003 Santa Monica Film Festival.

"Obviously, in Minnesota and Wisconsin you expect a good response," Knezevic said. "But we've had screenings in Florida and, particularly, Los Angeles where everybody's a little more jaded and we had great audience response. That's been pretty fulfilling."

In September they thought they had a distributor. They wanted the potential distributor to see the movie in a friendly crowd, so invited him to see it during the Central Standard Film Festival in Minneapolis.

"We thought what would seal the deal was for him to see a crowd watching it," Rudy said. "It's one thing to see it on TV, but it's really neat to get into a room with about 150 people who want to laugh."

But lightning struck the theater that night and knocked the sound out. By the time the problem was fixed, it was 11 p.m.

"By then there were about 15 people left, and half of them are asleep," Rudy said. "It was a disastrous showing. The distributor flew out the next day and we could tell he wasn't that interested anymore."



TRIO: Hockey tourney sends friends on journey through film-making

But the film had one more showing. It was a daytime showing, and it turned out to be a beautiful sunny day. They were expecting the worst.

"We thought no one was going to show up, but about 100 people showed up," Rudy said.

One of those people just happened to be a co-founder of the Filmmakers Alliance in Los Angeles.

"She had a film in the festival that we had seen," Rudy said.

"Just as a courtesy, she came to see our film. We thought she would hate it, and she loved it. Little did we know that she was trying to come up with five films that would be part of the initial release of the Filmmakers Alliance Collection.

The deal was sealed, and "No Sleep 'Til Madison" is part of that initial release on Tuesday.

"If this has proven anything to us, it's that you never know where your break's going to come from," Rudy said. "Now, our biggest goal is to make back enough money for investors who four years ago took a chance on us and also pay back all the people who worked on the film and deferred their pay. Deferred pay in the movie business usually means you never get paid. We would love to break that tradition. We have a real shot of doing that with this distribution deal."

Then, it's on to the next film. "We're ready to go," Moe said. "I've got a script called 'American Monster,' which is kind of a modern spin on the Rhinelander Hodag myth. I've already showed it to Jim, and he wants to play a part in it. What we're hoping is we have a good run of DVD sales with 'No Sleep' so we'll be able to take that to potential investors and say, 'Look, we can at least get you your money back.'"

With all the hard work expended over such a long period of time on this movie, the trio of friends all said it was their long histories together that probably kept everything rolling on track without any personnel conflicts.

"It's a buddy movie on the screen," Knezevic said, "but it's also the quest of three lifelong buddies to make a movie together."

Owen Fenby would like that.

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Submitted photo

JIM GAFFIGAN stars as Owen Fenby in "No Sleep 'Til Madison," a movie being released on DVD Tuesday.

More info

You can buy "No Sleep 'Til Madison" at www.nosleepthemovie.com.

Freeze frame



Jed Resnik (Vern), T.J. Jagadowski (Greg), Jim Gaffigan (Owen) and Michael Gillo (Tommy) play the roles of broomball players in "No Sleep 'Til' Madison." Most of the cast comes from Chicago, but many Madisonians are picking up cameos in the film.

Former Madisonians translate their passion for hockey into an independent film

They pledged to someday return to Madison and make a movie.

And that's exactly what they've done.

About two weeks ago, three childhood friends — Peter Rudy, Ivo Knezebic and Erik Moe — returned to town and not so quietly began filming a low-budget independent movie.

The film, "No Sleep 'Til' Madison," is a comedy about four guys who return to Madison as a reunion for the state high school hockey tournament.

But the story dips deeper than that and offers an insider's view of life on the road and one character's obsession with sports — in this case hockey.

As teens, Rudy and Moe played hockey for Edgewood High School. Knezebic played for Middleton High School.



NATASHA
KASSULKE

"After high school we all moved away from Madison but continued to have this joking obsession with Wisconsin high school hockey," Rudy recalls.

Moe even started a betting pool on the high school hockey tournament in Los Angeles where he now lives.

Rudy says people in California got a kick out of the small-town Wisconsin

names like Spooner and Woodville.

"People who didn't even know hockey in California became interested and started asking us things like if Waukesha Memorial won or not," Rudy recalls.

Last February Moe and Rudy were plotting a way to return to Madison for the high school hockey tournament. Making a film was the perfect way to sell the three-week trip to their wives.

Rudy, who is a freelance writer in San Francisco, and Moe, who works for Universal Studios in Los Angeles, co-wrote the screenplay. Knezebic, who is a producer for the Leo Burnett ad agency in Chicago, is the producer.

They hired David Fleeer, a Madison



Actor Rick Moe, playing the role of "Broomball Player No. 1," slips a shot through the goal as Brad Millsap, director of photography, runs film. The action took place west of Madison.

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JOHN MANIACI/WSJ photos

Several former Madison high school hockey players have returned to film "No Sleep 'Til' Madison." David Fleeer (left), of Madison, is directing the film and is pictured here on the set with two former Madisonians, writer-directors Erik Moe (center) and Peter Rudy (right).

Film

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independent film, video and TV director and former member of The And (a local 1980s pop group), to direct the film.

Now Rudy, Moe, Knezebic and Fleer are partners in the production company. They also raised money from friends and family to finance the 20-day filming.

Local businesses have chipped in, too. Dean Kalschuer's Dodge in Cross Plains donated vehicles.

Lake Mills Cleaners gave them a big green and yellow van, which they've turned into a traveling living room set.

Family friends plus several restaurants — Rocky Rococo, Del-Italia, Bread Barn and Culver's Frozen Custard — donated food.

The UW-Madison Film Department is renting them equipment.

"And you might spot a lot of our investors making cameos in the film," Rudy notes.

One local businessman even invested in the film for the opportunity to play the role of a pizza delivery person.

Rudy's mother, Petie, also appears in the film playing a mascot. She revived the Tigger costume from her role in CTM Madison

Family Theatre's 1997 play "The New Pooh or the Unbouncing of Tigger."

"It's a great clean-cut adventure story," Petie notes. "It makes you laugh and cry."

Other notable extras include Sue North (wife of golfer Andy North). Peter Rudy's son, Lucas, also makes his first film appearance in "No Sleep 'Til Madison."

The crew includes about 40 people, and the lead characters are Chicago-based talent.

The lead actor is Jim Gaffigan, who is working on a project with David Letterman's Worldwide Pants production company.

Rudy says he hopes to shop the film at independent film festivals.

"We're hoping for the best, but every day there is a new challenge," Rudy says. "You really learn the levels of anxiety when one day you are driving down the Beltline in a snowstorm and see the van carrying all your talent get smashed by a car spinning out of control."

But slick roads and unpredictable weather are just a few of the risks that comes with filming in Wisconsin. Rudy says it is worth the risk.

"Even the most stressful day filming still beats what we all do for a real living," Rudy says. "We're trying to keep it fun because opportunities like this don't

come along every day."

Rudy says the Midwest is becoming a filming hot spot fueled by the success of such movies as the "Straight Story" and the "American Movie" documentary.

"The Midwest has become hip again," Rudy says.

The "No Sleep 'Til Madison" crew will film here through the WIAA State High School Hockey Tournament, which runs Thursday through Saturday at the Dane County Coliseum.

"We said, if there is ever a movie that we are going to make this is it," Rudy says, "because it is so close to our hearts."

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Hockey movie scores for all

There are only two words in the English language that bring fear and loathing into my husband's heart: chick flick.

Because he's patiently sat through a lot of girly television and movies, for the sake of marital harmony I recently brought home a movie that I thought would appeal more to him than to me.

It had B-O-Y written all over it, and I saw this as a chance to even the score. The biggest surprise of the night, however, was that it turned out that we both loved a movie about Wisconsin high school hockey.

"No Sleep 'Til Madison" bills itself as a movie about hockey, but the great cast, superb writing and local ties make it difficult to categorize. It is much more than a buddy movie or road trip film, which is how it is often characterized. This outstanding indie film is greater than the sum of its parts. It is a human tale that was



FILE PHOTO

Several former Madison high school hockey players have returned to film "No Sleep 'Til Madison." David Flier (left above) of Madison is directing the film and is pictured here on the set with two former Madisonians, writer-directors Erik Moe (center) and Peter Rudy (right).

not only highly watchable but also laugh-out-loud funny and extremely entertaining.

"No Sleep" received a lot of ink locally when it was first released in January 2002. Madison natives Erik Moe and Peter Rudy co-wrote the film based on their own life experiences. Both grew up on the west side of Madison, played on the Edgewood Crusaders high school hockey team and were teammates again when they attended Lawrence University in Appleton.

After leaving Wisconsin to pursue careers in advertising in California after graduation, Moe and Rudy often returned to attend high school hockey matches, becoming regular fixtures at the game. Lacking any familial connection to the teams, they often raised the eyebrows of those in attendance. It was their own obsession with Wisconsin high school hockey that led to the creation of "No Sleep 'Til Madison." The film was shot entirely in and around Dane and Dodge counties in just 20 days in 2000.

The story line revolves around Owen Fenby, a under-achiever who passionately clings to his bygone days of hockey stardom. Fenby is played by Jim Garrison — a perennial situation comedy B-lister. Anyone remember the short-lived CBS sitcom "Welcome to New York"? Garrison's credits also include a regular role on "That '70s show" and "Ed" but he is truly in his element here cast as an obsessive hockey fan. Much like "Peter Pan," Fenby refuses to grow up, and his focus on the WIAA hockey championships obscures any thing else in his life — his girlfriend, his job, his friends. Other cast members include Ian Irmann, T.J. Jagodowski, Michael Gilio, Jed Resnik, Rebekah Louise Smith, Molly Glynn Hammond, Jason Wells, Ivo Knezevic, Alex Ferrer, and David Flier.

This film works so well because of See MEDIA, Page 3C

Boomers' lives change forever after medical emergency



HENRY A. KOSHOL/EXPHOTO CAPITAL TIMES

STROKE WARNING SIGNS

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Loss of speech or trouble understanding speech.
- Sudden dizziness or loss of vision in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden, severe headaches with no known cause.

(Source: American Stroke Association)

STROKE SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUPS

Meriter Hospital sponsors two community support groups that offer stroke survivors some education, social interaction and ongoing support. Both groups are open to stroke survivors, their families and their caregivers.

The Madison Area Stroke Support Group meets from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month at the Meriter Community Education and Health Center, 202 S. Park St. The Young Adult Stroke Survivors Support Group meets from 6 to 8 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month at Meriter Hospital's Day Rehabilitation Center, 202 S. Park St.

For more information, call Louise Joyce, a Meriter recreation therapist who coordinates the groups, at 267-6173.

Serious medical problems happen at any age, and they can change your life forever, says Ralph Sandler and his partner, Patricia Eldred. Sandler was 52 when he had a stroke 12 years ago.

In the blink of an eye

By Debra Carr-Elzing

The Capital Times

No one saw it coming. Not Ralph Sandler — who was behind the wheel at the time, driving his car in the center lane of a three-lane freeway — or his partner, Patricia Eldred, who was in the passenger's seat.

They were on their way home after having lunch at an Irish restaurant in downtown Alexandria, Va., when Sandler had a stroke.

It was May 7, 1992 — a date that will be forever crystallized in their minds.

"Initially, I thought something was wrong with the car when I saw Ralph start to make funny gestures and shift around," Eldred recalls.

"But when he couldn't answer my questions, I realized that something was wrong with him."

Sandler managed to drive the rest of the way home. After pulling into the driveway, however, he collapsed before paramedics arrived to take him to the hospital. At age 52, the stroke — or "brain attack" — left him unable to speak and paralyzed on the left side of his body.

"This was totally unexpected, and it turned our world upside down," Sandler says.

He still has a condition called aphasia, which means he has some difficulty with speech as a result of the stroke, but physical therapy — and strong determination, which Eldred fondly refers to as Sandler's "stubbornness" — helped his body recover.

In 1992, Sandler — who is a former director of both the Madison

The Game of Life



A CONTINUING SERIES

Civic Center and the Wisconsin Union Theater — was doing consulting work for the National Endowment for the Arts. At the time of his stroke, he was making plans to relocate to Maine, where he was to start a new job as arts presenter at the University of Maine.

"Our plans changed," he says in an understatement.

The couple now live in Madison, where Sandler does professional photography and Eldred is director of development and communications for Independent Living Inc.

"We moved back to the Midwest to be near our families," Eldred says.

Sandler now works out three times a week, and he can outwalk Eldred. Speech difficulties remain, however, and prompted a career change for Sandler, who also had been a professional actor.

"We never dreamed our lives could change so quickly or so dramatically after a single medical event," Eldred says. "It was devastating that Ralph could no longer perform the occupation that he had always done."

Still, there are blessings to be counted in the physical gains made so far in Sandler's recovery.

Like most people, however, neither Sandler nor Eldred expected to deal with such a serious health problem in their 50s.

"Aging baby boomers need to plan for the unexpected," says Sam Mueller, a family counselor in Sun Prairie.

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Heavenly scent: Incense offers extra link to God

By Madeline Scherb

Special to The Capital Times

Set foot in Holy Transfiguration Malankara Orthodox Mission on any given Sunday, and it's easy to understand why members like to say the place "smells Orthodox." Incense builds in the cozy space like an old-time preacher's sermon — first gently warming the air, then robustly thickening it, and finally rising to the rafters amid a chorus of ethereal bells that make the presence of angels seem possible.

"Incense is a good reminder that our prayers aren't just what we say, they rise up (to God)," says the Rev. John-Brian Paprock. Or, as parishioner Nancy Zjaba says, incense "is the thing that stands right between the visible and the invisible."

Nestled in the second story of a building owned by St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church on Madison's far west side, Holy Transfiguration is a small but dedicated congregation. Members are converts from other faiths more commonly found in Wisconsin such as Lutheran and Presbyterian.

Protestant services traditionally emphasize the spoken word over elaborate rituals. But Paprock says Orthodox Christian tradition holds that all five senses, including smell, can help bring people closer to God. And while Paprock delivers a sensual smorgasbord — velvet embroidered vestments, a lace-laden altar, liturgical music, even home-baked blessed bread that's a treat for anyone who has sampled a mass-produced communion wafer — parishioners say it's incense that pulls it all together.

Frankincense is the most common type of incense used by Holy Transfiguration and other Madison churches. It's now easy to buy at stores like Madison Church Supply, but the highly prized tree resin was once found almost exclusively in southern Arabia. Camels were hauling loads of incense along trade routes in the ancient Middle East as early as 700 B.C. The New American Bible famously mentions frankincense as one of the gifts the Wise Men brought to the infant Jesus. Romans, Greeks and Egyptians were the

See INCENSE, Page 3C



MICHELLE STOCKER/EXPHOTO CAPITAL TIMES

The Rev. John-Brian Paprock uses incense during the service at Holy Transfiguration Malankara Orthodox Mission.