

Master of cinematic voodoo

Death of film processor Rick Doe leaves empty space in Calgary's film community

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Calgary's film community lost one of its most esteemed and valued members on August 26 when Rick Doe, owner and operator of The Local Lab Movie Film Services, died from a heart attack. Doe's death came four months after he announced he would be closing the facility.

The sole lab in Calgary that processed and printed motion-picture film also served much of Western Canada for the last 25 years. Doe started out as an employee at Cine Audio film lab and bought the business in the late '70s, changing the name to The Local Lab. He had a strong reputation due to his willingness to experiment, his wide range of services and ability to deliver projects, and his generosity with his knowledge and talent.

"In processing, exposed film is developed into a negative, which is then printed into a positive image. In concept, similar, but far, far more complicated than still-film processing, because the images actually move," explains Rick Garbutt, a local camera operator, special-effects technician and personal friend of Doe's for over 25 years. "There is a standard chemical recipe, but at some point a certain amount of voodoo kicks in." In that voodoo lay Doe's talent.



A chapter ends — Rick Doe, owner of The Local Lab, was a talented

hand and walk it through the way other labs will only do if they see a name like Paramount on the can." By all accounts, Doe was a man who always came through.

With a degree in biochemistry from B.C.'s Simon Fraser University, Doe was a vital source of information about the delicate chemical art. Some specialists are protective of their knowledge, but Doe shared his expertise with many people he worked with. "He taught me so much about processing," says Letourneau. "In many ways he was a mentor and a teacher to me. He had this way of always explaining things at your level, whether you knew a lot about it or nothing at all," says Morison.

Garbutt remembers it was with sadness that Doe announced the impending closure of his Lab in May 2004, but he was left with no alternative. For years he watched video and later digital video

encroach upon his medium.

"The 'local lab' as an entity is sort of a doomed creature," says Letourneau. "You can probably count the number of them in Canada on one hand. They're either struggling or being swallowed up by large conglomerates." With no one in Calgary taking up the mantle, it would seem, as Morison sums up, that "a chapter has ended."

A shy, humble, highly intelligent man who would only reluctantly accept praise for his work, Doe never made a film of his own, but Morison remembers he once commented, "Every print is a unique chemical event." It was a very organic, very human view of his craft — or perhaps his art.

A tree will be planted for Rick Doe on June 12, 2005 at Nose Creek Valley by McInnis & Holloway Funeral Homes. Details of the ceremony will be available closer to the date by calling 276-2296.

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well, processing and printing are aspects of post-production that go unnoticed when a film is screened. If done poorly, problems with colour and jittery images — and much worse — will show up onscreen every time the film is run.

One of Doe's regular customers was Gerald Saul, an animator, experimental filmmaker and professor of film production at the University of Regina.

"About a month ago I got a film back from him," says Saul. "I'd told him, 'Print this however you want. Go crazy. Break all the rules.' Only my wife and I have watched it so far, but it's the most beautiful thing I'll ever show an audience. The colours shift, they turn, they're vivid, they're beautiful," says Saul. The film, *Anger*, is part of Saul's Toxic Series which the filmmaker is dedicating to Doe on its DVD release. "His influence on those films was very profound," he says.

Doe was an invaluable resource for aspiring filmmakers, offering services such as negative cutting and Super-8 processing — services so rare they now often carry the niche-market tag. "It didn't matter what you needed, you could take it to Rick," says SALT film instructor and freelance cinematographer Phil Letourneau.

"Rick often took orders internationally because he offered services that have become extremely rare, such as black and white 8 mm processing," adds Garbutt.

But it is at home that Doe will be dearly missed, most notably by his adult children Meagan and Nigel, and by his many friends at

the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (CSIF).

"He was a huge supporter of the local scene," says Letourneau. More than a craftsman, Doe attended screenings and was an active member of the community. "CSIF people would often go over the lab and sit on the couch drinking coffee and just yak about film stuff. If he wasn't working on something, he'd join in," says Garbutt.

Local filmmaker James Beattie

Morison, who created the \$100 Film Festival, says that when it came time for that festival, Doe often worked long hours doing last-minute processing and printing for participants. To a certain extent, that kind of round-the-clock, night-hawk lifestyle was just a reality of the business, but the job was more than a way to earn a living for Doe.

"He really gave a damn about what he was doing," says Garbutt. "He would take your project by the

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