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# Business Report

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COURTESY RED STICK INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL

BY STEPHANIE RIEGEL

Inside a dark editing suite at the Digital FX studio on Perkins Road, animator Aaron Michel is showing off the three-dimensional cobra he created for a recent episode of National Geographic's TV series *World's Deadliest Animals*.

Michel deftly types on a keyboard with his left hand and manipulates a stylus with his right hand while keeping his eyes glued to the monitor before him, where an animated image of the snake's skeletal system is squeezing the life out of its victim.

That National Geographic would farm out its special effects to a Baton Rouge shop speaks volumes—both about the caliber of companies like Digital FX and the reputation the market now has as an emerging player in the world of animation. Just a few years ago, movie and television producers only did this kind of work in Los Angeles, New York or London. Now, they come here.

Give credit to the Red Stick International Animation Festival, which celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since its inception, the event has established itself as one of the premier animation festivals in the U.S. and draws partici-

pants from around the world. As a result, Baton Rouge now is on the map for animators and producers looking for animation and digital special effects work.

"The festival has done an amazing job of putting Baton Rouge on my radar," says Dan Lund, a former animator for Walt Disney Animation Studios who worked on such films as *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King* and *Home on the Range*—the latter being the last hand-drawn film produced by Disney—and is now a California-based independent producer.

"Any independent project that I'm pitching around town, I always bring up the idea of trying to produce it in Louisiana."

But note Lund's words: Like others in the industry, he lumps all of Louisiana together. So while the Red Stick International Animation Festival has been a boon to Baton Rouge, it's also been good for New Orleans and Shreveport. In the minds of executives who live in the sprawling megalopolis of Los Angeles, one city in southeast Louisiana is virtually indistinguishable from another. That's important to remember, because if Baton Rouge wants to grow this segment of the economy it has to be willing to share the wealth.

**CREATURE COMFORTS:** Animator Aaron Michel works on a computer-generated crustacean in his editing suite at Digital FX's studio on Perkins Road.



ARIE CONSTANTIN

"I was talking to some folks about doing a project and they kept trying to keep it in Baton Rouge," Lund says. "I kept telling them the important thing was just to get it to Louisiana."

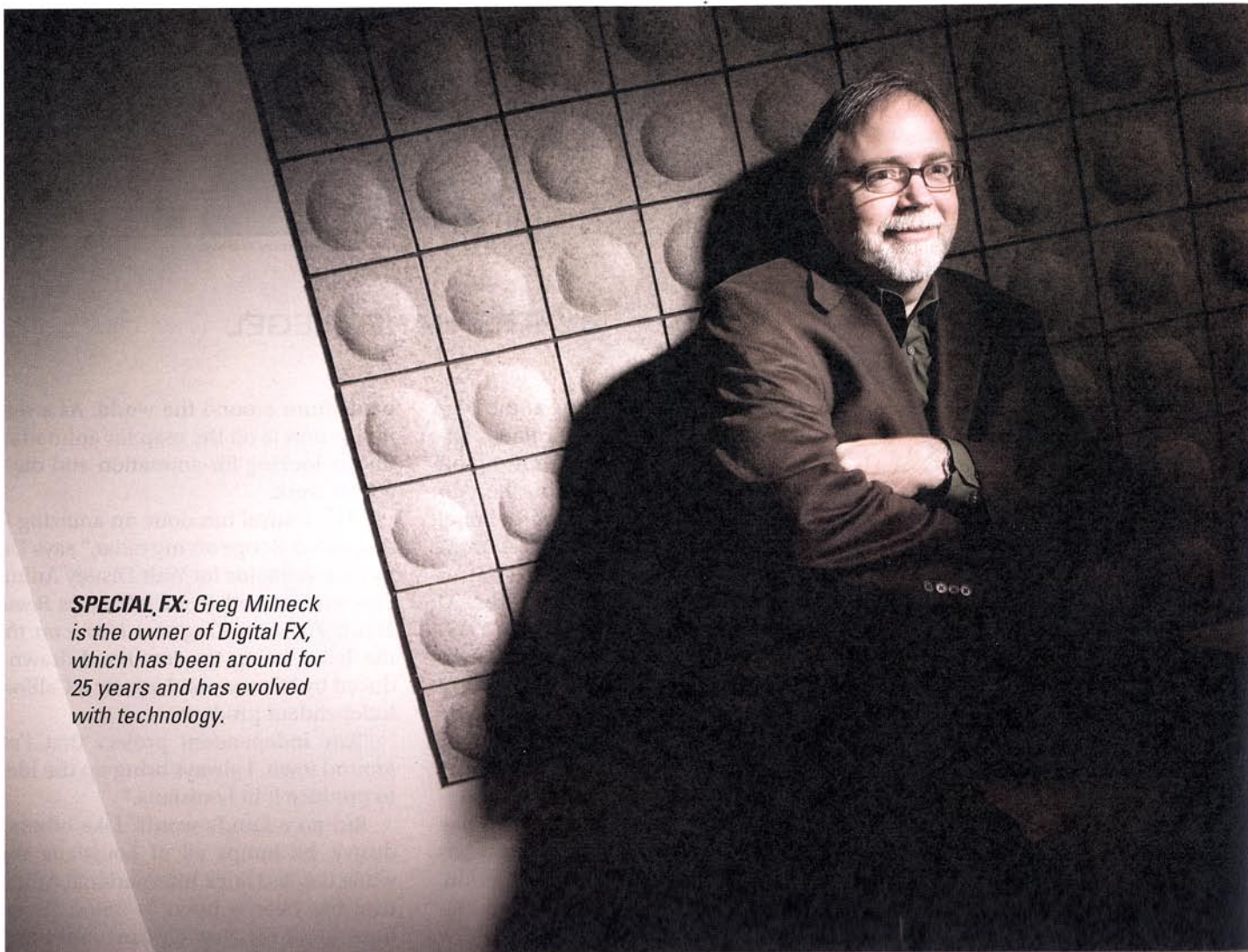
**B**efore you can have a discussion about animation in this market, you have to understand that it's part of a much bigger digital media picture. Animation—which includes everything from old-fashioned cartoons to Pixar-type 3-D creations to the movement of a company logo in a TV commercial—is one type of digital media. Video game development is another. Baton Rouge is trying to grow both—with considerable success.

Three years ago, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, city-parish government and LSU formed the Baton Rouge Area Digital Industries Consortium. BRADIC's purpose was to develop a digital media industry here.

Since then, Electronic Arts—one of the largest video game manufacturers in the world—has announced that it would locate its lone North America testing center on LSU's South Campus. Several smaller companies have also sprung up, building impressive national markets for their products. Their presence allows BRAC and others to leverage those names in their business development efforts.

"EA gave a legitimacy to Baton Rouge," BRAC President/CEO Adam Knapp says. "It has given us an ability to go have conversations with other industry leaders."

State tax credits also have helped. In addition to the 25% production credits available to movie and television producers—which includes producers of animated films—video game developers also can receive tax credits. The



**SPECIAL FX:** Greg Milneck is the owner of Digital FX, which has been around for 25 years and has evolved with technology.

MAURIEE CONSTANTIN

state program gives them a 20% credit for their first two years in business, 15% during their third and fourth years and 10% in their fifth year.

"We feel the digital media industries have even more growth potential than Hollywood South," says Sherri McConnell, the director of entertainment for the Louisiana Office of Entertainment Industry Development. "This is truly where the growth potential is, and we've gotten in early."

**T**he Red Stick Animation Festival really got the ball rolling. Its roots date to 1999, when the state passed an IT initiative to fund the Center for Computation and Technology at LSU. CCT's purpose was to promote economic development for the state by using computational applications to aid research and develop solutions that benefit academia and industry.

That's a tall order, and organizers

of the upstart initiative weren't sure where to start.

"We asked ourselves, 'OK, how can we have the most effect? What's really going to change the state?'" says Stacey Simmons, who is the director of the festival as well as BRADIC. "For us, the answer was threefold: digital media, high-performance computing and hardware and software development."

Of the three areas, the state had the least experience in the area of digi-

## HISTORY OF ANIMATION

### 1800s THE SCIENTIFIC AGE



George Eastman and Thomas Edison

1824

**Peter Roget** presents his paper, "The persistence of vision with regard to moving objects," to the British Royal Society.

1824

A thaumatrope is a toy used in the Victorian era. It is a disk or card with different pictures on each side and attached to two pieces of string. When the strings are twirled quickly between the fingers, the two pictures appear to combine into a single image.

1831

**Joseph Antoine Plateau** and **Simon von Stampfer** simultaneously invent the phenakistoscope, which produces an illusion of movement by allowing a viewer to gaze at a rotating disk containing small windows. Behind the windows was another disk containing a sequence of images.

1834

**William George Horner** invents the modern zoetrope, a cylinder with vertical slits around the sides and a series of pictures on the inside edge of the cylinder opposite of the slits. As the cylinder spins, the user looks through the slits, which produce an illusion of motion.

1868

**John Barnes Linnet** patents the first flip book, which is a set of sequential pictures seen at a high speed to create the illusion of motion.

1877

**Charles-Emile Reynaud** invents the praxinoscope, a more sophisticated version of the zoetrope. It uses the same mechanism of a strip of images placed on the inside of a spinning cylinder, but it is viewed through a series of stationary mirrors instead of slits.

1889

**Thomas Edison** invents the kinetoscope, which projects a 50-foot length of film in 13 seconds.

1889

**George Eastman** manufactures photographic film strips using a nitro-cellulose base.

tal media. It didn't have a track record. How to build one?

"Our answer was to create an event that would help us build legitimacy very quickly," Simmons says.

The first festival was held in 2005. It was small but showed potential, recall those who attended. In a sense, that it was held in Baton Rouge helped fuel its success because of the contagious enthusiasm it generated.

"In L.A., you can find a lecture to go to any night of the week where you can meet and mingle with people in the industry," Lund says. "Down there, you get that once a year at the Red Stick Animation Festival, so the people are pretty rabid about seeing every single lecture and doing every single thing. That makes it a really good festival."

By last year, Red Stick was attracting players from all over the world, and this year's promises to be the biggest yet. The festival has received more than 400 films from 45 countries for its annual Best of the Fest competition. In previous years, it received between 200 and 250 films from as many as 30 countries.

"Most animation festivals are decades old," says Stuart Sumida, a biology professor at California State University San Bernardino who is a comparative anatomist and paleontologist and specializes in the biomechanics and evolution of locomotion. He has served as an anatomical consultant on more than 35 films, including *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Mulan* and the *Harry Potter* series, and is one of the presenters at this year's festival.

"Red Stick has started attracting top industry professionals in less than five years. This development is incredibly fast for so young a festival."

That's significant for several reasons. Like the presence of EA's testing center, the Red Stick International Animation Festival is now a calling card

**WHAT:** Red Stick International Animation Festival

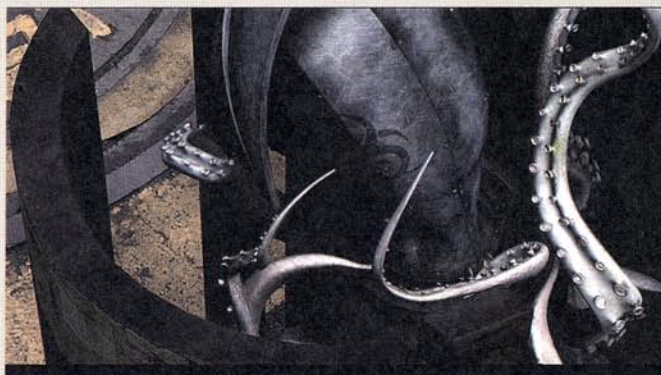
**WHEN:** April 22-25

**WHERE:** Shaw Center for the Arts, Manship Theatre, LSU Museum of Art, Louisiana Art & Science Museum Planetarium, Old State Capitol

**CATEGORIES:** Animated short film [student and professional], music video, scientific visualization, animation for commercials, animation for games, animation for young audiences, experimental animation/visual music [student and professional], storyboard competition

**ON THE INTERNET:** redstickfestival.org

## DRAWING CARD



Melodica (clockwise from upper left), True Love Hotel and Octopus are three entries in this year's Best of the Fest competition.

that BRAC and state officials can use when trying to attract other companies to the Capital Region.

"Because it has made it through a number of years now, it has the attention of a lot of the top animation studios in the country," Knapp says. "Right now, it's the only U.S. animation festival of its size and kind that is purely an animation festival, so that in and of itself is a pretty major accomplishment."

Consider that major studios now send representatives and speakers to

the festival for fear of being left out. Most notably, Disney now is calling to be included as opposed to the other way around.

One of Disney's premier animators, Andreas Deja, was the keynote speaker last year and the recipient of the festival's inaugural lifetime career achievement award. Deja is best known as the supervising animator of some of the most memorable Disney villains: Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*, Jafar from *Aladdin* and Scar from *The Lion King*. He also animated Roger Rabbit

from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, King Triton from *The Little Mermaid*, the title character from *Hercules*, Lilo from *Lilo & Stitch* and Queen Narissa from *Enchanted*. In addition, he is the current resident specialist for the animation of Mickey Mouse.

This year, Disney is sending Mark Henn, one of its premier animators/directors who specializes in heroines and heroes such as Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, Jasmine from *Aladdin*, the young Simba from *The Lion King* and

## 1900-29 THE SILENT AGE



Mickey Mouse with Walt Disney

### 1906

**J. Stuart Blackton** makes the first animated film, *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*. Blackton draws comical faces on a blackboard and films them; he stops the film, erases one face to draw another and then films the newly drawn face.

### 1908

**Emile Cohl** produces *Phantasmagorie*, the first film depicting white figures on a black background. Cohl also makes *En Route*, the first paper cutout animation, a technique that saves time by repositioning the paper and not redrawing each new cell.

### 1913

**Otto Messmer** and **Pat Sullivan** create an American cartoon series called *Felix the Cat*. **J.R. Bray** devises *Colonel Heeza Liar*, and **Sidney Smith** creates *Old Doc Yak*.

### 1914

Bray applies for a patent on numerous animation techniques; among the most revolutionary is the process of printing the backgrounds.

### 1914

**Winsor McCay** produces a cartoon, *Gertie, The Trained Dinosaur*, consisting of 10,000 drawings.

### 1914

**Earl Hurd** applies for a patent for the technique of drawing the animated portion on a clear celluloid sheet and then photographing it with a matching background; this became known as cel animation.

### 1923

**Walt** and **Roy Disney** co-found Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio.

### 1927

**Warner Bros.** releases *The Jazz Singer*, combining sound and images.

### 1928

**Walt Disney** creates the first animated cartoon with synchronized sound, *Steamboat Willie*, marking the official debut of the studio's iconic character, Mickey Mouse.



**CAREER NIGHT:** Walt Disney Animation Studios' Andreas Deja, who has drawn some of Disney's most memorable villains—including Scar (inset) from *The Lion King*—receives the Red Stick International Animation Festival's inaugural lifetime career achievement award last year from Mayor Kip Holden.

the title character from *Mulan*. Henn will receive the festival's second lifetime career achievement award.

The festival also has elevated LSU's reputation. Red Stick has played host to scientific imaging sessions that are an obvious connection to the academic departments on campus, and

will continue to do so this year.

That's raising awareness at other universities that offer graphics and digital animation curricula. The student workshops at last year's festival were packed, and many of the attendees came from far away.

"Last year, we had a portfolio review

of kids who had traveled 24 hours to get there," Lund says. "It was really impressive."

Local companies doing business in the animation field also notice a difference. Digital FX has been around for 25 years and has evolved with technology. In recent years, it has noticed explosive growth in its shop as well as industry-wide.

"There are more people in the local industry in general," says Greg Milneck, owner of Digital FX. "I see more young people taking an interest in this field. I'm getting more applications for openings, and I'm seeing a lot more talent."

His firm is also receiving a lot more national work, which tends to have a snowball effect. Digital FX was listed in the end credits of the National Geographic series for its animated snake. Since then, the firm has received calls from several other national producers, including The History Channel.

"We've been so busy, there have been occasions where we've had to turn down work," Milneck says.

**D**espite its early and obvious success, the market in Baton Rouge still is young for digital media in general and animation specifically.

BRAC doesn't even track its contribution to the local economy because the numbers are too statistically insignificant. Similarly, observers on the national scene say Baton Rouge is not yet in a league with the big boys.

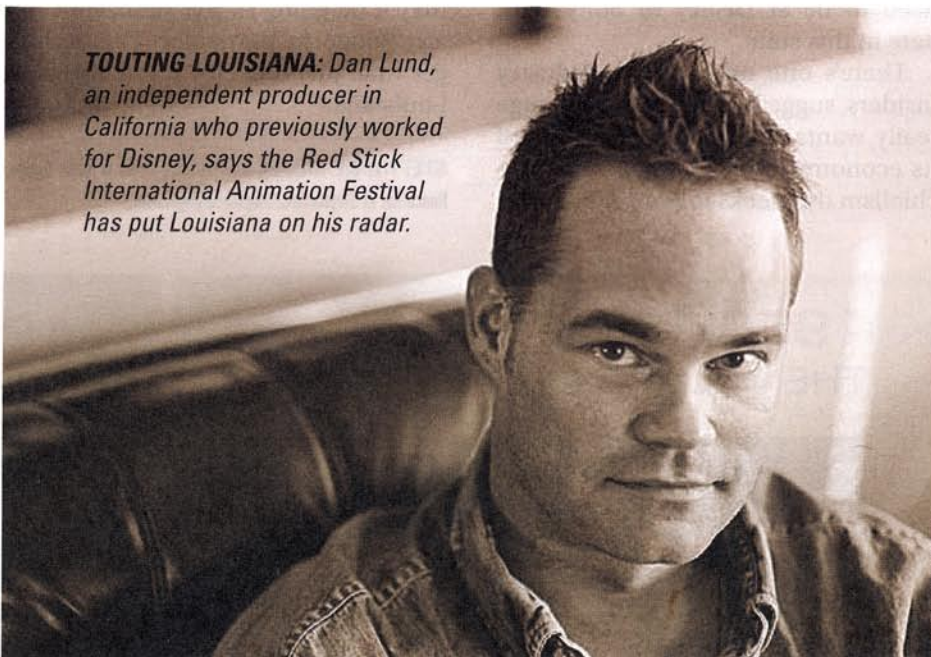
"It's an emerging market that along with several other emerging markets has been able to jump into the game," Sumida says.

If Baton Rouge wants to continue to expand its presence in animation and other digital industries, it will have to focus its efforts on workforce training.

LSU is trying to do that. Last year, it launched the AVATAR [Arts, Visualization, Advanced Technologies and Research] initiative, a hiring plan to bring in top-flight talent to educate students in animation and other digital media curricula. It's a good first step, but it's easier said than done; no new star faculty member is on board.

"Any **independent project** that I'm pitching around town, I always bring up the idea of trying to **produce it in Louisiana.**"

DAN LUND, producer, Dan Lund Films



**TOUTING LOUISIANA:** Dan Lund, an independent producer in California who previously worked for Disney, says the Red Stick International Animation Festival has put Louisiana on his radar.

## 1930-49 THE GOLDEN AGE



Walter Lantz

### 1930

Universal Studios produces *The King of Jazz*, in it is a short animated sequence by **Walter Lantz**—best known for creating the character of Woody Woodpecker—which uses the two-strip technicolor process for the first time.

### 1930

Looney Tunes cartoons, a series of shorts created by **Warner Bros.** to promote its music, makes its debut with *Sinkin' in the Bathtub* featuring a recurring character named **Bosko**; Looney Tunes introduces **Porky Pig** in 1935, **Daffy Duck** in 1937 and **Bugs Bunny** in 1940.

### 1930

**Betty Boop** makes her cartoon debut in *Dizzy Dishes*, produced by **Max** and **Dave Fleischer** for Paramount Studios.

### 1933

The Fleischers adapt characters from the King Features comic strip *Thimble Theatre*—a cast that includes **Popeye the Sailor**—for Paramount Pictures.

### 1937

**Walt Disney Studios** releases its first fully animated feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, effectively launching what is called "**The Golden Age**" at Disney; the studio releases 19 animated features through 1967, including classics such as *Pinocchio* [1940], *Fantasia* [1940], *Dumbo* [1941], *Bambi* [1942], *Cinderella* [1950], *Peter Pan* [1953], *Sleeping Beauty* [1959], *101 Dalmatians* [1961] and *The Jungle Book* [1967].

### 1940

Hoping to duplicate the success of studio rival Warner Bros., **MGM** debuts the cat-and-mouse duo *Tom and Jerry*, created by **William Hanna** and **Joseph Barbera**.

### 1945

**Harry Smith** produces animation by drawing directly onto film.

COURTESY DAN LUND

COURTESY RED STICK INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL

“We’ve been **so busy**, there have been occasions where we’ve had to **turn down work.**”

GREG MILNECK, owner, Digital FX

“We have to hire a whole cadre of people who understand this world — animators, computer scientists, musicians and so on,” Simmons says. “And when you start talking about faculty members with PhDs, it’s hard to find 12 people in a year.”

Until those faculty members are brought on board, it will be a challenge to recruit the best and brightest students in the country to come to LSU to study animation and digital media. It also will be a struggle to keep and cultivate local talent here.

“I think the hardest part to convey to students is that this isn’t something that’s out of their reach,” Simmons says. “They can learn the skills they need to be at Disney or Sony right here in this state.”

There’s one other thing: Industry insiders suggest that if Baton Rouge really wants to grow this segment of its economy, it has to shed the parochialism that seeks to limit the growth

and success of animation to the Capital City alone.

While the Red Stick International Animation Festival may have put Baton Rouge on the map, all of Louisiana stands to benefit. From a national perspective, the important thing is to have a thriving region with a well-trained workforce and a variety of options from which projects can be shot and produced.

“People in my industry in California are always asking me why I’d want to go all the way to Louisiana to produce,” Lund says. “I have to explain to them about how great it is down there. I’m of the opinion that once the party starts, people will come your way. But they’ll be going to the state—not Baton Rouge in particular. This is bigger than just one city. It’s about all of Louisiana.”

**STEPHANIE RIEGEL** is a freelance writer in Baton Rouge. Reach her at [Stephanie@StephanieRiegel.com](mailto:Stephanie@StephanieRiegel.com).

## DIGITAL DESIGNS

A look at some of the projects involving Digital FX:

### COMMERCIALS

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana
- Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center
- Raising Cane’s
- Red Stripe Beer (right)

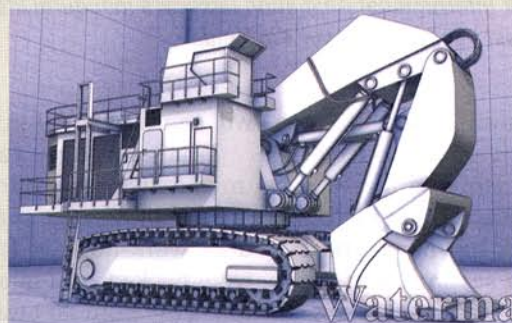


### FILM

- *Blonde Ambition*
- *Cleaner*
- *My Mother’s New Boyfriend*
- *Smother*

### TELEVISION

- *Mega Movers*, The History Channel (below)
- *World’s Deadliest Animals*, National Geographic Television



PHOTOS COURTESY DIGITAL FX

## 1950-79 THE TELEVISION AGE



William Hanna and Joseph Barbera

### 1957

**Hanna-Barbera Enterprises** is formed after MGM shuts down its animation studio; the animators create cartoon shows such as *Huckleberry Hound*, *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *The Yogi Bear Show*, *Jonny Quest* and *Scooby-Doo*.

### 1960s

Animated television programming that became known colloquially as the Saturday morning cartoons becomes a staple of the major networks.

### 1964

**Ken Knowlton**, working at Bell Laboratories, develops computer techniques for producing animated movies.

### 1972

Director **Ralph Bakshi’s** *Fritz the Cat* becomes the first animated feature film to receive an X rating by the Motion Picture Association of America; it also becomes the first independent animated film to gross more than \$100 million at the U.S. box office.

## 1980-present THE MODERN AGE



Who Framed Roger Rabbit

### 1982

**Walt Disney Productions** releases *Tron*, the first movie that extensively uses computer graphics.

### 1984

**Universal Studios** releases *The Last Starfighter*, which becomes the first movie to use computer graphics instead of models.

### 1988

**Walt Disney Productions** releases *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, which combines live-action scenes with animation sequences; the film receives financial success and critical acclaim, and becomes the forefront for the modern age of animation. Producer **Steven Spielberg** convinces Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures and Universal Studios to “lend” their characters to appear in the film; he is not able to acquire Popeye, Felix the Cat or Tom and Jerry.

### 1989

*The Simpsons*, an animated sitcom created by **Matt Groening** for the Fox television network, makes its debut; the series is the longest-running U.S. sitcom and the longest-running U.S. animated program.

### 1992

Classic animation properties receive new life with the creation of **Cartoon Network**.

### 1993

**Universal Studios** releases *Jurassic Park*, which uses computer graphics for realistic living creatures.



### 1995

**Pixar Animation Studios** and **Walt Disney Productions** release *Toy Story*, the first feature-length film generated completely on computers.

### 2001

**Columbia Pictures** releases *Final Fantasy: The Spirit Within*, a box-office bomb that is often cited as the first computer-generated movie to attempt to show realistic-looking humans.