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Arts & Culture



David Marchesani's film 'The Road Ahead' chronicles college life without the 'Animal House' aspects.

Entrepreneur finds path to filmmaking

By Marti Gacioch

When David Marchesani first decided that he wanted to make films, he didn't know a great deal about the technicalities of actually producing them, but that didn't stop him from writing and directing his new movie, "The Road Ahead."

His slice-of-life comedy follows three college men and their roommates as they prepare for graduation. According to Marchesani, the 80-minute film mirrors many of his college experiences.

"I wrote it because every movie I saw about college students was something like "Animal House" or a road trip movie where the characters did ridiculous things, so I thought that there was a lot of territory available to explore the anxiety of how students really transition to adult life," he said.

The film, made for less than \$10,000, shows his characters dealing with such life experiences as job hunting and deciding whether to continue or end longtime relationships because their college days are nearly over with.

"I think that a lot of us went through these same events and we forgot about them over time," Marchesani said, "but when I show the movie to college seniors and talk to them about a lot of these issues, they're all still going through the same stuff that I went through in college."

The New Jersey native became interested in the world of movies as a teenager, but he initially doubted that filmmaking was available to him as a career.

"I didn't grow up knowing any actors or screenwriters, so I just assumed that filmmaking was something for other people — not people from my neighborhood," he said.

But by the time Marchesani neared high school graduation, he had his heart set on attending film school, but his parents urged him to study something practical like business instead. Fortunately, he was also interested in the business world and enrolled at Indiana University where he earned a degree in finance. But while working for a Chicago company in his 20s, he never completely gave up his dream of making movies.

"It gnawed at me because I thought that I had two or three good story ideas, and I'd hate to become 50 years old without having explored making them," he said.

After enrolling in a few screenwriting classes, Marchesani started on his first script, and during the writing process, he just wanted to get his story on paper without critically editing himself.

"I thought of the script as a blueprint rather than the finished product," he said, "so I decided that I didn't need to write it perfectly to begin with because I'd learn how to do it correctly before I started any filming, and I also thought that I'd be directing it anyway and would find ways to communicate the story better."

After Marchesani started working in San Diego, he fell in love with the city, but was soon laid off in the 2000 economic downturn. Not wanting to leave the area, he enrolled in the entrepreneur graduate program at San Diego State University.

To complete that degree, he had to write a thesis, and he decided to make a film for his project.

"I designed my thesis to show that the entrepreneur program was so expansive that students could use it for almost anything, including making a movie," Marchesani said. "Being an independent filmmaker is similar to being an entrepreneur or founder of a start-up company because you must raise financing for your movie and hire actors and crew members."

Starting in 2003, Marchesani took a semester off to film the movie that is set at Indiana University, and he only recently completed the final product. The production involved 25-30 people, including the actors, and Marchesani shot the movie entirely in San Diego by using a friend's home, a bar and various parts of the SDSU campus. He is now marketing the film through a Web site, www.theroadahead.com and there's a sweepstakes available for the target audience when they buy a copy.

"My dream is to sell enough DVDs myself so that some studio will take notice of it," he said. "I don't have any connections and I'm learning as I go, but my financial training has helped me a lot."

In the meantime, Marchesani continues to show the film to small groups of people in his target audience and may show it at campus movie theatres throughout Southern California.

While he was filming, "The Road Ahead," Marchesani simultaneously began filming his second movie, a documentary about entrepreneurship in San Diego. He hopes to have it available on DVD in the fall.

"It marries my two interests: my love of filmmaking and my love of entrepreneurship," said Marchesani.