



MACTAN ISLAND is now being developed as the next Hollywood in Asia with the opening of Bigfoot's International Academy of Film and Television.



A MODEL poses underwater for Mick Gleissner's Nautical Angels.

THE joy of traveling is like this: The experience leaves you with a fine imprint of memories that is sure to last till this writer hits the age of 80. Coming from a boxed past of doing work that I did not love and being surrounded by uniformity, boredom and steep quotas, I was able to get a glimpse of what its like to be "king of the world" when I was invited to experience Cebu in style hosted by Michael Gleissner, Chairman of Bigfoot Group of Companies, a multinational conglomerate with business interest in Communications, Business Process Outsourcing, Learning and Entertainment.

At only 36 years old, Michael (or Mick, as he is fondly called) has set his sight on making Bigfoot the leader in the entertainment industry by taking a fresh approach in creating high impact and valued programming and products that "entertain, inform and inspire." Based in North America and Asia, he produces quality independent feature films, television programming, as well as educational and corporate content designed for international audiences. His team of award-winning producers, directors and writers from Hollywood and other film capitals of the world, now operate in a newly-constructed, world-class production facility located in Mactan Island, Cebu.

HOLLYWOOD IN ASIA

Arriving in Cebu, our team was met by great sunshine and warm smiles from the queen of the south. Immediately, we were whisked away by van and brought to our accommodations located within the 8,200 square-meter sprawling complex that houses the International Academy of Film and Television (IAFT), owned by Bigfoot Entertainment. Facing

Journey to HOLLYWOOD in Asia

By VICTOR S. BERNARDO and JOYCE A. RAMIREZ

a picturesque beachfront, the IAFT combines the very best of both worlds—state-of-the-art film-making facilities and a wonderful beachside lifestyle.

Our group was billeted in five adjacent suites, designed to accommodate visiting Hollywood royalty complete with the usual perks fit for a celebrity—plasma TV, DVD, living room, mini-bar, fruit basket, 180 thread count sheets and a luxurious bathroom with glass panels and rain shower head. For once in my life, I felt what it was like to be Leonardo Di Caprio.

Lunch was served in a traditional Thai restaurant downtown hosted by Bigfoot's Director of PR & Marketing Communications, the lovely Daphne Chua together with Jessica Kelly from the Bigfoot headquarters in L.A. Our group delighted in the finest of Thai delicacies, and teased the vegetarian Jessica who ended up struggling with the meat dishes.

During the afternoon, we were given a comprehensive tour of the IAFT Academy, sans the traditional mini golf carts used at Universal Studios. The campus boasts the most advanced soundstage, recording and Foley studios, a Dolby-certified sound mixing theater, and Final Cut Pro digital editing suites. We then went for a meet and greet fashion with the Bigfoot Team headed by CEO



BIGFOOT'S Mick Gleissner with one of his models.



THE WRITER with Cebuano heartthrob Matteo Guidicelli.

served buffet style at Bigfoot's version of Starbucks Café (aptly named Big Bucks!) downtown at BFE's Corporate Office Tower.

THE ULTIMATE UNDERWATER EXPERIENCE

Our next day's adventure included a choice between two tasks: Yachting or Diving.

muscleman Matt Lubetich, VP of Technical Operations Mark Cabaluna, Creative Development Head Tim Doolen, Sales & Marketing Director Claude Howard, IAFT Academic Director Gemma Lucero, and Project Architect Sarah Abadia. We learned that beginning January 2006, the IAFT will offer a one-year Immersion Program to aspiring filmmakers from around the world. Under the direction of Hollywood-trained filmmakers, students will have the chance to take film courses in cinematography, directing, editing, producing, screenwriting and sound design. The academy's philosophy is to combine both theory and real-world applications to create a hands-on approach for students. The course will consist of five 9-week sessions, with tuition cost that range between US\$8,000-5,000. The goal is for students to write, produce and direct their own material and the exemplary ones will get a chance to go on an internship program with Bigfoot Productions helping them to create their own professional show reel. Later, dinner was

in yachting, teams got the privilege to enjoy Mick's multi-million dollar Sun Seeker yacht docked at Shangri-La Mactan. Here, everyone got to enjoy the beautiful waters of Cebu, wine in tow. In Diving (where I was the only one brave enough to volunteer), I finally got my chance to see Moalboal underwater guided by a certified PADI-diver. But the most interesting part came when Mick showcased his unique style of underwater photography, now compiled into one beautiful calendar called Nautical Angels (incidentally, the calendar promotes the beautiful marine life in Cebu). "Many of us have had the pleasure of seeing stunning visuals of marine and coral life in the specialized field of underwater photography, but very rarely have we been exposed to settings underwater involving real people," explains Mick. With his fascination for diving, photography and beautiful women, Mick decided to up the ante by taking up the unique challenge of underwater fashion photography.

All the training in relaxation, breath holding, bubble making and strategic

hair movement the models receive will culminate in the shoot. An ideal shot captures the model relaxed, posing in the right place with eyes open, with hair floating upwards and out of her face, and bubbles just above her head. The hair and bubbles are considered the icing on the cake—the stamp of proof that the shot took place underwater. The longer the model is able to hold her breath, the higher the number of shots per shooting window. Her relaxation training teaches her to pose in this challenging environment without looking tense or panicky. Her bubble training allows her to release bubbles at a particular pace (as too many bubbles can block her face altogether). All these will prepare the model to coordinate her jump with the aforesaid directions. The myriad of all these factors will certainly limit the chances for success.

"Unlike traditional photography, which allows the changing of camera lens to be relatively easy and accessible, underwater photography requires a camera with an underwater housing that are fitted for a single-sized lens. Hence, a shoot may require three separate cameras with different lenses and housings." Mick usually descends with one camera, having decided ahead of time which lens he would use. However, at times, extra cameras might be required. For shots requiring mobility, Mick wore scuba gear. However, for shots that required a static shooting angle, he wore custom-made shoes weighing 8 kilograms for greater negative buoyancy. Unique to Mick's Underwater Fashion Photography is the aquatic set design, recreating a basketball headboard, boxing ring and bench press demanded tremendous creativity and engineering and perseverance. His production crew spent days of trial and error to create set designs that would sustain in an underwater environment. Good visibility and a clear sky can also go a long way to create the ideal photo opportunity. Mick and his team often use tide and time table predictions provided by the Coast Guard to study the size and direction of currents to schedule photo shoots.

Bigfoot's International Academy of Film and Television has offered numerous workshops specifically created to introduce students to the basics of filmmaking since its formation in 2003. It has conducted corporate training programs with Filipino media conglomerate ABS-CBN and has graduated more than 300 students in just over a year. In the next 12 months, the IAFT will also conduct workshops on Acting, Animation, Editing Certification, Underwater Photography, Sound Design, Guerilla Filmmaking, Documentary making, Dance and Singing. For more information, visit www.study-film.com.



THE MEDIA group aboard Gleissner's multi-million Sunseeker Yacht.

Where to stay in Metro Manila

MANILA HOTEL	★	527-0011
EDSA SHANGRI-LA	★	633-8888
WYRE SUITES	★	771-7777
NEW WORLD RENAISSANCE HOTEL	★	811-6888
MANDARIN ORIENTAL MANILA	★	750-8888
MAKATI SHANGRI-LA	★	813-8888
PAN PACIFIC MANILA	★	536-0788
DUSTY HOTEL NIKKO	★	887-3333
CENTURY PARK HOTEL	★	528-8888
THE RICHMONDE HOTEL	★	638-7777
HYATT REGENCY MANILA	★	833-1234
THE WESTIN PHILIPPINE PLAZA	★	551-5555
THE BELLEVUE MANILA	★	771-0181
BAYVIEW PARK HOTEL	★★	526-1555
THE PEARL MANILA HOTEL	★★	400-0088
TRADERS HOTEL	★★	523-7011
GREAT EASTERN HOTEL	★★	371-8282
GREAT EASTERN HOTEL-MAKATI	★★	888-2888
CITY GARDEN SUITES	★★	536-1451
LOTUS GARDEN HOTEL	★★★	822-1515
CHERRY BLOSSOMS HOTEL	★★★	524-7631
CITYSTATE TOWER HOTEL	★★★	400-7301
THE SULO HOTEL	★★★	824-8081
BEST WESTERN HOTEL LA CORONA	★★★	524-2631
ALOHA HOTEL	★★★	526-8088
CITY GARDEN HOTEL MAKATI	★★★	889-1111
LAS PALMAS HOTEL	★★★	521-1000
HORIZON EDSA HOTEL	★★★	532-3021
FERNANDINA 88 SUITES HOTEL-ARANETA CENTER	★★★	813-8594
HOTEL REMBRANDT	★★★	373-3333
MANILA MANOR HOTEL	★★★	525-0665
MAKATI PALACE HOTEL	★★★	889-0344
BEST WESTERN ASTOR HOTEL	★★★	750-7884
ROYAL BELLAGIO HOTEL	★★★	889-5555
TRI-PLACE HOTEL & APARTELLE	★★★	415-5224
CORPORATE INN HOTEL-MANILA	★★★	526-5001
THE COPA BUSINESSMAN'S HOTEL	★★★	845-3328
COPACABANA APARTMENT-HOTEL	★★★	831-8711
STONE HOUSE BED & BREAKFAST	★★★	724-7891
RIVIERA MANSION	★★★	523-4511
THE CONTEMPORARY HOTEL	★★★	716-5260
MIS PHILIPPINES FLOATING HOTEL	★★★	521-2777

LEGEND: ★-DELUXE
★★-1ST CLASS
★★★-STANDARD

Bigfoot brings Hollywood to Cebu

By Monje Lustre

Only a visionary can think of something so wild it just might work. No one believed Ted Turner when he said people needed a 24-hour news network. CNN, snidely dubbed by critics as the Chicken Noodle Network, has now become as basic as chicken soup — invading every little known corner of the globe at any given second.

Just like CNN, Cebu was a move that can only make sense to a Michael Gleissner. In all the places in the world and in all the places in the Philippines, he picked a city which was not Manila. Even more surprising was the fact that Mick wanted Cebu to be Asia's gateway to Hollywood.

Matthew Lubetich, chief operating officer of BigFoot Entertainment, repeats the corporate legend of how their chairman fell in love with our City of Smiles having been trapped in breathtaking Shangri-La Mactan Hotel for two weeks during the 9-11 tragedy. But what Matt can't fully explain why the Bigfoot Group of Companies (with a complex network of business investments in communications, business process outsourcing, learning and entertainment) found itself occupying 11 floors in a Metro Cebu building and developing an international film school complete with sound stages, a hotel and dormitories in Mactan Island to the tune of \$8 million.

The Mick Gleissner website describes him as a director, writer and photographer. His latest work involves painstaking underwater photography for his 2006 Nautical Angels Underwater Calendar. He trained his long-legged models to wear weighted heels, keep their eyes open and hold their breaths long enough to look alive on camera. This project had him relying on good old luck with very little (if any) technical magic involved.

For those who know him well, the Cebu ideal is not that surprising. Mick has always had the boldness of a pioneer. At 18, he started his first company which introduced the CD-ROM as a retrieval media in Germany. Then, in 1991, he became a trailblazer in e-commerce by developing a bulletin board system (allowing connection between computers via dial-up networking through modems) even before the Internet became widely available. Six years later, he built a call center in Namibia, Africa for German customer service a step ahead of the popularity of such technology. The year before, he sold his companies to VERIO (which later became NIT) and Amazon.com for which he was vice president for some time. Later, he acquired Bigfoot which was formerly an e-mail directory.

Then, as corporate legend would have it, Mick transplanted the company in Cebu and developed Bigfoot Communications Powerhouse (conference call services, audio and web conference call, directory services, a dating service) as well as Bigfoot Entertainment (the parent company of Bigfoot Productions, Bigfoot Production Services, the International Academy of Film and Television or IAFT, Bigfoot Production Services, Bigfoot Soundworks, and Bigfoot Partners).

Bigfoot Entertainment's first film production is *3 Needles* starring Lucy Liu, Chloe Sevigny, Olympia Dukakis, Sandra Oh, Stockard Channing and Shawn Ashmore. Set in three continents (Asia, Africa and North America), the movie presents three tales that humanize the AIDS epidemic. It has been shown in the international film circuit having debuted in the 30th Toronto International Film Festival last September where it earned a special presentation. Within the month, it had screenings at the Atlantic Film Festival where it won for Best Direction (by Thom Fitzgerald) and Ed Higginson Cinematography (by Tom Harting). Just last month, *3 Needles* graced the Pusan International Film Festival in Korea.

"The primary goal of Bigfoot Partners is to invest in independent films which would have difficulty being produced," explains Tim Doolen, director of Creative Development. "*3 Needles* is one of the first two films we've produced. Bigfoot Partners will be producing small films with very modest budgets of around \$200,000 to \$5 million. That's a small film because a typical Hollywood film now would cost \$30 million to

The newly-constructed 8,200 square meter facility of the IAFT boasts soundstages, recording and Foley studios, a Dolby-certified sound mixing theater and Final Cut Pro digital editing suites.



Needles topstar Lucy Liu, who agreed to a massive pay cut from her usual \$5-M per film to portray Jin Ping, a woman who sets up a blood donor clinic in rural China.



Chloe Sevigny plays a devout but rebellious novice who tries to use force to stop an HIV-positive man from spreading the disease, but ends up creating tension and resentment within the community one is assigned to in South Africa.

\$40 million. We're talking about smaller-scale films which will hopefully have a bigger impact on the audience than, say, the big Hollywood blockbusters like *War of the Worlds*. One of our other goals is to portray Asian culture in a positive light to a Western audience. We have felt that Asian culture does not get enough representation to Western audiences. You have Jacky Chan and Jet Lee and that's about what we see of Asian culture. But Asia's much more than kung fu or ninjas."

Early next year, Bigfoot will be shooting its first feature film in Cebu. *Inversis*, a domestic psychological thriller, is actually set in Hong Kong. While production will begin in the former Crown Colony, most scenes will be shot locally. After that, the company will produce the action comedy *Cock Fight* which was rewritten (from its former setting of Mexico) specifically with Cebu as backdrop. The lead role will be played by an American actor, preferably a known comedian such as Adam Sandler (a preference Timm thinks out loud). But supporting roles will, of course, be played by local actors who will be picked from auditions in Cebu and in Manila.

"We're very committed to the Philippines. We're very committed to Cebu (But) our products are primarily for a world audience. We're currently not making anything for the local market. However, local companies do use our facilities and services. All except about three of

our employees are based in Cebu," Timm adds.

Facilities and services offered by Bigfoot now includes the only true sound stage in the country — a 370 square areas which VP for Technical Mark Anthony Cabaluna calls "at par with international standards." Sound Stage One will be the first of three true sound stages in the IAFT complex. Acoustically, it boasts of having "special sound-lock 'ante-rooms' that are spatially designed to buffer noise before entering noise sensitive areas; high grade acoustic doors which perform to STC64dB control noise transmission and guarantee no disturbances during studio sessions; an air-conditioning system of greater than NC 25 with continuous operation (approximately 30 dB background noise level); internal absorptive finishes maintaining a room response RT60 @ 500HZ 0.81 second and "woodwool" acoustic boards that are impact resistant (DIN 18 032 / Part 3) and fire retardant (DIN 4102)."

The film school itself is equipped with a mix theater (81 seating capacity with Dolby 5.1 digital recording and editing), a Foley stage and music theater with NC25 acoustic noise criteria and edit suits and computer laboratory that can provide everything from special effects and animation to computer simulation for film or video.

Technology, however, is only part of the equation. The intention, really, is to bring Hollywood to Asia

through Cebu. Better yet, Bigfoot is bringing Asia to Hollywood. "When we talk of Hollywood, we're talking of filmmaking done certain way which we're hoping South East Asia can get on board. Of course, Filipino films can make it in the international market," assures Matt who likewise fell in love with Cebu he married a Cebuana. "You will really see that change when Vic del Rosario of Viva Films is able to translate some of his titles. I watch Filipino films at home all the time and I don't understand them. Give me translations and I'll watch a lot more. So, when you see that happen, you will really see the market shift and be more competitive."

The group is optimistic that the Philippine Film Industry is not dying. It's transitioning. Proof of this optimism is the International Academy of Film and Television (IAFT) which will open its doors to the first batch of film students in January. Their message is simple: To survive, Filipino filmmakers must join the global village.

"We want to not only attract students locally but internationally as well," stress Bill Vincent, vice president of the IAFT. "The same goes for our faculty. Each course is run by a mentor who supervises; instructs and counsels the student. Many of the mentors are Hollywood people. Right now, we're talking to an acting coach from Brussels who may want to teach here."

The one-year immersion program

(starting January) will cost foreign students \$8,000 while local students get a discounted rate of \$5,000. Courses offered are animation, cinematography, directing, editing, producing, screenwriting and sound design. Students are also encouraged to specialize in electives like 3-D animation with Maya, underwater photography, documentary filmmaking, compositing with after effects and guerilla video (filmmaking on limited resources). Short courses are also made available through regular workshops.

"What's interesting about our programs, whether they're the one-year immersion or just a workshop, is that we ask the student to come up with a creative project which is either a short film or a music video. This, eventually, becomes part of their portfolio which we also keep to show potential employers," assures Gemma Lucero, academic director of IAFT.

Rotating enrollment for a new class of 24 students will be every two months starting January. Applicants should be at least 18 years old, have a high school diploma with some experience in photography or filmmaking (even as an amateur hobbyist). Tuition fees do not include materials and housing. Dormitories are conveniently located within the complex. There will also be a hotel for visiting family members and friends.

Meanwhile, IAFT only offers certificate courses. There are, at this point, no plans of developing diploma course. "The school teaches the craft and not necessarily the academics of it," Bill emphasizes. "You will find that it's very attractive to the US community colleges which would send their students over to use our facilities and would later accredit them. Besides, filmmaking is not a field that strictly requires one to have a diploma. Many of those in Hollywood don't have a college degree in their field. And there are also many film graduates who are out of work."

The most talented student of IAFT also have the chance get involved in Bigfoot Entertainment's various projects. Currently in post production are the films *Social Grace* and *Shanghai Kid*. Also to be shot soon is the documentary *Intoxicated* which will investigate the effects of alcohol on consumers. The company has likewise been producing two travel shows for television: *The Nautical Angels* featuring three women visiting exotic ports and destination in Southeast Asia and *Diving Asia* showcasing the best diving spots

in the region. Expectedly, the latter had a pilot entitled *Diving Asia* which was shot off Michael's favorite Shangri-La Mactan. The show also spawned a documentary of the USS *Cooper* wreck in Ormoc. Directed by Daniel Foster, the film captures the dangerous dive to uncover secrets left behind by one of the biggest battles of World War II.

The soft-spoken Timm Dollen is also busy searching for a project worthy of Bigfoot Partners' Film Fund. Target budget is \$200,000 to \$5 million. Accepted genres are thrillers, comedies and dramas with emotional impact. Storyline must portray Asia positively. Setting must be Asia with at least one of the lead characters being Asian. The film must be also marketable worldwide so dialogue must be in English.

"We also have the Filipino Filmmaker's Fund which is devoted to a Filipino film to be shot by Filipinos. We're actively soliciting ideas now," says Timm who invites submissions through their website (<http://www.bigfootpartners.com/invest1.html>). "We've talked to some people from Cinemamalaya and we gave away some of our cards but we only got a handful of responses and not too much interest. We know we're a new company and very few people know us. We're also in Cebu which is a disadvantage if you're targeting Manila-based filmmakers. But we really want to make a Filipino film with Filipino filmmakers. The English requirement is also an issue because Filipino filmmakers — and rightly so — are very proud of their own language. But for us, that's something we have to require. I know that we will find the right project."

Michael Gleissner is just as confident he can bet on Cebu. He hasn't been wrong about his business moves so far. There's no reason to think he's wrong now.



Located in the heart of Asia in Cebu, the IAFT combines the best of both worlds — state-of-the-art filmmaking facilities and a wonderful beach-side lifestyle.

ENTERTAINMENT

Text us your feedback: inquirer_ent_name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) or 283 (Smart)

Editor Emmie G. Velarde

A lift for RP show biz

By Marinel R. Cruz

- Five-year tax holiday for digital films
- Local movies' exemption from amusement taxes for the next five years.
- Tax exemption on all film-related raw materials and equipment
- Tax breaks for international production company, Big Foot Entertainment, by way of exemption from import taxes and duties of film equipment.
- Once-and-for-all implementation of Executive Order 255, which requires all radio stations to broadcast a minimum of four original Pilipino recording every hour.

THESE WERE PROPOSED BY VIC del Rosario—Viva Entertainment's big boss and presidential adviser on entertainment—in his latest report to Malacañang.

"If these recommendations are ap-

proved, we estimate that in five years, the local entertainment industry will fly," Del Rosario told *Inquirer Entertainment* on Friday. "By then, *hindi na kailangan ang tax exemptions.*"

According to Del Rosario, the tax holiday for digital films will cover amusement taxes, VAT, withholding taxes and income taxes imposed on producers of digital films.

Door to the world

"Digital films could be the key to global acceptance of Filipino movies," he pointed out in his report. "[They are] now accepted worldwide... [and] are more economically viable [since] they have reasonable budgets."

He suggested that importers of digital projector equipment likewise be exempted from import duties. "This will jumpstart both supply and the corresponding theatrical venues," he explained. (See *Viewfinder, Page A2-4.*)

Del Rosario also noted in his report that only 20 local movies had been released since the beginning of the year. He

added that market share of local movies had gone down to an estimated 10 percent to 15 percent, compared to the 50 percent market share 10 years ago.

"Film distributors brought in Korean, Japanese and Thai movies to pick up the slack in local output," said Del Rosario. "With appropriate government incentives, the Philippine film and entertainment industry could be globally competitive."

Big Foot Entertainment, a Hollywood production outfit based in Cebu, invested \$30 million and "is willing to invest \$120 million more" to operate a film school and world-class sound stage in Cebu, said Del Rosario.

"Appropriate tax breaks for Big Foot would enhance the country's competitiveness as a film production haven for foreign films," he explained. "This will provide local employment and facilitate technology transfer to local filmmakers and technical craftsmen."

Del Rosario also recommended a new



MATTHEW McConaughey

New kind of 'sexy'

"WAIT TILL YOU SEE the roles I could take after this," actor Matthew McConaughey joked to *People* magazine, which named him "Sexiest Man Alive" in a special edition that hit newsstands on Friday (yesterday in Manila).

"You're going to see my gut hanging over, plus 22 pounds. It'll be a whole new kind of sexy!"

Snapping at his heels on *People's* 2005 list of sexy men are Jake Gyllenhaal, Vince Vaughn, Orlando Bloom and Matt Damon.

This is the 20th anniversary of the title, which was first awarded to Mel Gibson. AFP

A lift for RP . . .

From page A2-1

Executive Order that would supersede EO 255. The new EO should provide stiffer penalties. (See story below.)

"There are local radio stations that do not play OPM at all," Del Rosario said. "If the state of local recording improves, this means that our live entertainment scene would also flourish."