

FROM SEA 2 SEA

The Prairies

With confidence gained from successful deals involving MOWs and feature films sold to more than 100 countries, Minds Eye Pictures CEO Kevin Dewalt is backing another winner. This time it is a television series for kids called *Mentors*. Produced by Margaret Mardirossian of Anaid Productions, with creator/writer/producer Josh Miller, the series has been winning awards and broadening Minds Eye's visibility. It's been available across Canada on the Disney-dominated Family Channel since October. The series follows the adventures of a young computer genius, Oliver, and his friend Dee as they zap historical figures into their 21st-century lives via an ingenious computer program. The scripts focus on a problem that a mentor solves for the teenagers. Ultimately, the solution enriches their experience—and the audience's—when some obscure or little-known facts about Einstein, Oscar Wilde or Joan of Arc are revealed. *Mentors* is being shot in Edmonton and directed by Arvi Lilmataninen. Miller says that the production has been "turned up" a notch, making it challenging for the cast, crew and budget, but ultimately, a richer viewing experience for the audience." The challenges ranged from filming with a live bear to recording with a full symphony orchestra. Mardirossian says, "We've received great response from the international market for the series".... Another Edmonton production with international impact and Mardirossian's involvement is *The Tourist*, produced by Big Schtick with comedian Rick Bronson and carried on the Life Network. Each episode takes Bronson to a North American destination; along the way, through humour and interaction with the locals, travel tips and intriguing facts keep the audience entertained and informed. Bronson and Neil Grahn are the co-creators. Grahn shares directing and travelling gigs with Brian Murphy and Bob Keates. The talents of associate producer Alexandra Zarowny and director of photography Mike Oulette of New Picture Crew Ltd. assist in the production.... Toronto-based Rhombus Media, the 1999 recipient of the Banff Centre for the Arts National Award (given to those who achieve much in their own careers and encourage and train the next generation of Canadian talent) received the Donald Cameron Medal, a \$10,000 cash award and a residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts.... Encouraging, indeed, is Local Heroes, a film festival that originated in Edmonton (March 31–April 8) and has spawned an offspring in Winnipeg (February 27–March 4). For details on both events check out the National Screen Institute Web site at www.nsi-canada.ca and the Local Heroes link.

Tim Christison



Mind's Eye Pictures' *Mentors*

West Coast

The Y2K nonevent means that Vancouver hasn't yet broken off and sunk into the Pacific—good news for us, but not for all those members of the various unions down in Hollywood screaming out for tax breaks geared toward helping U.S. producers compete with our deflated dollar. It seems that what's bad for our hockey teams is definitely good for the film business.... As deadlines loom, the competition for the awarding of Vancouver's newest television station has the various competitors scrambling for letters of support from prominent locals while the rest of us sip martinis and debate the merits of the applicants. Let's see. In addition to other promises—more than 30 hours of original local programming per week (of which 12 hours will be non-news programming and two hours will be magazine-style, cultural programming) and \$16 million allocated to prelicense a minimum of seven B.C.-produced movies each year—Toronto-based CHUM Ltd. pledges to produce at least 100 hours of a Vancouver-based soap. The mind boggles at the possibilities: fast ferry tragedies; lost snowboarders on Whistler mountain; backyard political shenanigans wherein promises are made and backyard decks are built; and the ghost of Bruno Gerussi hovering over the whole damn thing. Personally, I doubt if the soap will fly because what goes on out here puts most soap operas to shame. And even

if the CHUM soap is completely over the top, it will only appear more like reality—and we all know how well reality does in the ratings. The other applicants (Craig Broadcasting, Trinity Television, CFMT-TV) will also have pitched their proposals to the CRTC at the February 21 hearing. No decision is expected for six months.... Some of the people currently making movies in the rain: Sean Penn directs *The Pledge*, produced by Michael Fitzgerald and shot by talented cinematographer/director Chris Menges; *Once Were Warriors* director Lee Tamahori is helming Morgan Freeman in *Along Came a Spider*; Ernest Dickerson is making *Bones*; and Ryan Phillippe and Tim Robbins are starring in *Antitrust* under the direction of Peter Howitt.... Finally, the Vancouver film scene lost one of its veterans—and I lost a friend—when Ridge Theatre owner Ray Mainland was killed in a car accident in January. He owned the Ridge, Vancouver's only repertory cinema, for 15 years, providing a venue for a lot of great films and making a lot of friends along the way. He will be missed.

Jack Verme