

Lake Geneva Times

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UP, DOWN WEEK AT HOOPS: Badger High School's Ariel Altergott looks to make a pass during the Badger's Dec. 30 game against East Troy. Both the girls and boys teams split the holiday tournaments they played in. See photos and read about it in the sports roundup.
 - Page 6

START THE YEAR OFF RIGHT: Walworth County UW-Extension will offer the Strong Women - Healthy Hearts Program starting Friday, Jan. 6. The program is a 12-week, hands-on way to make positive changes and promotes eating better, moving more, and improving general health and wellbeing. Participants gather twice a week to exercise. Classes will be held on Wednesday and Friday mornings from 9:30-10:30 a.m. at the Walworth County Government Center, 100 W. Walworth St. in Elkhorn. The cost for the program is \$25. For more information or to sign up for the class, contact Wehmeier at (262) 741-4962.

SLOW COOKER CREATIONS.

He's got 'em snowed

Local man brings winter scenes to the big screen

By Cynthia Walker
CORRESPONDENT

While many winter enthusiasts have been waiting for the snowflakes to finally fall this season, one local man is not missing it because he's been busy making it.

Dieter Sturm of Lake Geneva has been making snow for Hollywood's biggest box office hits for more than 25 years, and has even garnered an Academy Award for his work on sets.

Letting the snow fly for such major motion pictures as "The Weather Man," starring Nicholas Cage, "Michael" with John Travolta and "Public Enemies," starring Johnny Depp, are just a few of the flicks included in Sturm's special effects portfolio.

Though he is the face of Sturm Special Effects International, he credits his wife and partner

See SNOWMAKER, Page 9



PHOTO SUBMITTED Lake Geneva Times

Dieter Sturm braces against the powerful blast of snow emitted as he readies the scene for the Wimpy Kid Blizzard Bus Tour. Creating snow for Hollywood movies and events has kept Sturm busy for 20 years.

Women's group to host discussion on challenges facing technical schools

The Geneva Lake Branch of the American Association of University Women will host a program featuring an update on the challenges and changes facing the technical college system, especially Gateway, on Thursday, Jan. 12 at 7 p.m. at Gateway Technical College, 40 County Road H in Elkhorn, Room 112.

The association will discuss how technical training is used locally, how it impacts local economy, where it's headed and how demographics and the labor market are affecting this local system.

A tour, presentation and question and answer period will be provided. The public is invited to attend.

For more information about the program or AAUW, contact Jean Henderson at (262) 723-5414.

Five districts will see

• Snowmaker (Continued from front page)

Yvonne for their success.

With her skills as a stockbroker, and his background in public relations, what started back in the 80s as a side gig quickly developed into a full-fledged snow job.

His work was first broadcast when he was asked to blow up a television set using his pyrotechnical specialties for a commercial.

The commercial and others that followed eventually caught the attention of a major Hollywood producer, landing Sturm the position of special effects coordinator for "Planes, Trains and Automobiles," in 1987.

From then on, the snowmaking business took off, as the couple, with son Kenny Coulman on board, secured projects for more than 60 major motion pictures over the next two decades.

Initially their projects involved a lot of pyrotechnics, but the legal complications of doing such dangerous stunts turned the company's focus toward the challenges of developing and placing all types of snow products in some very interesting places.

Though most would as-

sume the Midwest needs little help from Old Man Winter, Sturm Special Effects is credited for making a snowball fight come to life for a Wisconsin Department of Tourism commercial featuring the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. The company also recently completed the snowing of an entire city block in Highland Park, Ill., for a special shopping promotion.

Sturm claims to have "snowed" nearly every city street in Chicago.

The real snow made on this type of project is created from blocks of ice packed inside the snowmaking truck. The blocks of ice are shaved and then shot out of an 8-inch diameter hose by high-powered fans.

The mobility of the snowmaking trucks allow Sturm's crews the flexibility they need to get into areas traditional snowmaking equipment cannot.

Realistic snow scenes also involve careful observation of the precious white stuff.

"We're always studying snow - how it's falling down, how it's sitting on tree

branches, bushes and shrubs, the way it's sitting against windowsills, and the way it falls," Sturm explained.

That's why most of what he does is creative problem-solving, he contends.

Because some of the wintery scenes cover large areas, synthetic snow is a cheaper alternative to the real stuff.

Whether it's ground cover or falling snow, along with the added complications of current weather conditions and staying on budget - these are only a few of the choices he must make for each project.

"The real secret to making snow is to use about a fourth or a third of the synthetic snow in the background and distance and then bringing in the real snow for the front two-thirds or three-quarters of the scene," he said.

However, as he worked with the synthetic snow most filmmakers were using at the time, Sturm realized that the Styrofoam- and plastic-based products were not eco-friendly and made thorough cleanup difficult, if not impossible.

He said that's when his

creative genius was sparked and he began to develop a better, safer synthetic snow.

His first attempt resulted in a flake that degraded too quickly, but soon after he developed a product called snow 2™ - a flake that lasts four months and is both biodegradable and eco-friendly.

It was that flake that earned him the Scientific & Technical Achievement Academy Award in 1995.

"I had to ask for time off from working on the Miramax film "Beautiful Girls," so I could accept the award in person," he said.

And so he did - personally delivered by academy-award winning actress Jamie Lee Curtis.

The exciting opportunities continue with each flake.

"There's no business like snow business," he said proudly.

A recent project took his crew and equipment on a 3,500-mile journey across the east coast, producing more than 120 tons of snow for the Rolling Blizzard Tour, promoting the book "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever."

Every one of these proj-

ects has its own challenges and is always something new and different, Sturm said.

One of the most difficult projects to work on, he said, was making snow for the motion picture, "Horse Whisperer," starring Robert Redford.

According to Sturm, when he arrived on the scene there was no sign of snow.

Within two days, he put together a crew of 40 that worked around the clock to successfully create every bit of snow for the film's winter scenes.

"We went through thousands of gallons of snow foam and 56 semi trailers of bulk ice in two weeks," he explained.

One of his favorite projects was working with Oprah, when he and his crew traveled to Wyoming for a spur-of-the-moment still shot of the media mogul surrounded by snow for

“We're always studying snow - how it's falling down, how it's sitting on tree branches, bushes and shrubs, the way it's sitting against windowsills.”

- Dieter Sturm

the cover of "O" magazine's first anniversary edition.

In addition to chumming up with the most high-profile celebrities, Sturm is the exclusive U.S. representative for Snowflex, a high performance snow sports surfacing product designed for the skiing and snowboarding industry.

Sturm is responsible for Snowflex's use on the slopes at both Olympic training sites in Park City, Utah, and Lake Placid, New York - as well as the only public, all-season extreme, year-round ski slope in the United States - Liberty Mountain Snowflex Centre, located about four miles outside Lynchburg, Va.

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