

Filmmaker Will Lawson completing newest project

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

THE EDITING PROCESS is the part of filmmaking he enjoys most, said Will Lawson, head of film production at Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn.

Since the beginning of August, Lawson has been editing a 15-minute orientation film that will be shown to museum visitors beginning in October. The village's first orientation film was shot earlier this summer with character ac-

tor Pat Hingle as host-narrator.

Lawson, who selects cast and crew for the village's film projects, said of Hingle, "I had him in the back of my mind all along."

Hingle has worked for General Electric, doing TV spots as Tom Edison. He also did a one-man show as Edison. The veteran performer seemed a natural to interpret Greenfield Village to the public.

"WE HAD ONLY two days to work. He had 10 minutes of screen time. It was quite a bit of work. He really did a

superb job," Lawson said.

Lawson, a Birmingham resident, has been with Greenfield Village since 1975. Although he has worked on many films in his career, he is proudest of "La Grande Vitesse," which he wrote and produced back in 1972.

"I think it's the best thing I've done," he said of the 16-minute film story about Alexander Calder's stable sculpture at Vandenberg Plaza in Grand Rapids.

Lawson received the opportunity to do the motion picture when he was working as in-house filmmaker for the college's public relations office.

He compared the Calder film — which was done "for people to experience the making of the sculpture" — to the orientation film shot at Greenfield Village. In both, he tried "to create a little bit of mystery. We don't want to lay things out for people."

Lawson said the orientation film takes a philosophical approach, creating a frame of reference for the museum's collection.

THE 240-ACRE museum covers 150 years of industrial history. Emphasizing the Industrial Revolution, it shows the change from farm to industrial culture.

The orientation film begins with someone growing up in the 1930s, then goes back to preindustrial times. The village is used as a stage and buildings as artifacts to tell the story.

The film is trying to clarify something about Henry Ford as a person growing up in this age of transformation.

Visitors will see the film in a new theater being built at the museum. A permanent part of the setting will be a Ford personal-history museum, an exhibit area dedicated to Henry Ford.

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— Will Lawson

Lawson said that during shooting of the orientation film with actor Hingle, "We really put him to the test and worked long hours. I found him to be the most professional person I've ever worked with."

The only time Hingle became impatient was with unnecessary delays. "He's really a stage actor at heart. When he's ready, he expects us to be ready."

HINGLE IS a familiar face to TV viewers and has appeared on such shows as "M*A*S*H" and "S.L. Eise-where." He also makes about a half-dozen movies a year. Recent stage roles include Big Daddy in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" at the Los Angeles Civic Theater.

Other noted actors who have worked at Greenfield Village include E.G. Marshall, James Whitmore and Burgess Meredith.

Lawson is executive director of the museum's orientation film. He hired the writer, photographer and crew of 18 people.

"My love in filmmaking is in post-production," he said. "When I'm editing, I forget about lunch hour."

Lawson has been a resident of Birmingham since 1954. He went to Birmingham schools, graduating from Groves High School. He attended Grand Valley State College in Allen-



Will Lawson of Birmingham, who heads film production at Greenfield Village, chats with actor Pat Hingle during shooting of an orientation film for Henry Ford Museum and the village.

dale for five years, studying psychology and fine art.

"Ever since age 14 I've been working in film. I worked summers for a Detroit motion picture producer," Lawson said. He did industrial films for the automotive market and worked for the tourist council. He was a production assistant and editing assistant. "I spent a lot of years at Ross Roy," he said.

At Greenfield Village, he does color photography for publications and has a routine production schedule for TV news clips including public service spots.

A ONE-MAN department, Lawson

hires the people necessary to make each film. Usually, he will be the cameraman and hire one or two production assistants and a sound man.

Lawson said a library of films about the village is provided free for group presentations, service clubs, classrooms and travel agents.

Many film projects require a lot of research by Lawson. "You need research necessary to develop the visual story," he said. When the Harvey Firestone Estate was moved from Ohio to the village and an 18th century Saltbox House was moved from Connecticut, he did careful research before filming.



Lawson enjoys all phases of motion-picture work but especially editing the film.

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