

Filmmaker leaves documentaries for movie made in Michigan

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Jim Jabara doesn't seem to mind leaving behind the elephants in Sri Lanka and panthers in Tanzania for the chance to bring a heart-warming story with a message to the screen. The filmmaker traveled all over the world making documentaries for National Geographic, PBS and the Animal Planet. Now he's back home in Michigan to begin shooting a film about a little boy with cerebral palsy.

Jabara's already put in plenty of leg work scouting locations in Plymouth, Brighton and surrounding areas in order to make the movie tentatively titled *Discovery on Blackbird Island* after a book by Johnnie Tuitel. Securing rights to the story, writing a script and finding investors are just a few of the tasks needed to lay the groundwork before filming begins in mid-July.

"I think you can make a good film anywhere but it's hard in Michigan to pitch people," said Jabara whose public service announcement for Michigan's loon license plate can be seen locally. "Banks don't have good feeling about movies. It's a foreign subject to them."

But Jabara isn't about to give up

on the project featuring a heroic-type character confined to a wheelchair. Jabara and wife Josephine believe in the film. Since founding Our Small Planet Films and Multimedia in 1991, they've produced award-winning movies around the world. It's time to tell a story with role models who set a good example for children. Jamie, the youngest of their three children, has cerebral palsy and is a hero to them.

"It's about these kids discovering cats and dogs who were put there by a person working with an organization involved with stealing animals to sell them to laboratories," said Jabara. "Through a series of clues, they crack a pet theft ring. It's all about animal welfare and what Johnnie can't do but can do."

"There's not too many films where a kid with a disability can be a hero."

"There are really two reasons for making it," added Josephine, vice president of United Cerebral Palsy-Michigan. "There's a lack of movies that don't contain foul language and bad role models. I'm active in schools and the parents complain about it all the time, and second, that you're a kid whether you have a disability or not."

"There are 500,000 people with cerebral palsy in the U.S. right

now. We wanted to make a family feature film but it's been difficult to find someone with a disability, ages 11 to 14, with acting experience."

"They're still looking for a child to fill the role regardless of acting credentials. Age is critical, the younger the better, because Jabara would eventually like to turn all four of Tuitel's books into films."

"We have someone in mind but we'd still like to find out if there's anyone with a disability with act-

ing experience or a hidden talent to send in an audition tape," said Jabara.

Making this film may be the biggest challenge in Jabara's career so far, one he never envisioned while making videos of his band while a student at the old Plymouth High School on Main Street. In fact, it wasn't until after receiving a degree in environmental education 25-years ago that Jabara decided to go into television production.

From there it was on to filming

The Sloth Bear for international distribution in the series *Wild Horizons*, *Asian Elephants: Wanted Alive*, and *Florida Panther*, co-produced with Living Planet, for the Endangered series. Along the way he met Josephine at a television conference in Washington, D.C. Jabara continued producing documentaries including *The Golden Jackal* for National Geographic, and various footage for

television stations in Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, France, and Australia.

For more information about auditioning for the role or helping in any way, call the *East Lansing production company* at (617) 351-1660 or send e-mail to movie@oursmallplanet.com. More information can also be found at the Web site: www.oursmallplanet.com.



Switching locations: Filmmaker Jim Jabara leaves the wild behind to tell a fictionalized story about a little boy with cerebral palsy. Jabara is pictured during filming of projects with Michigan black bears and Asian elephants.

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July 18	Little Bear * 11am & 7pm	July 20	Kenny Rogers	July 21	WDVD Modern Music Festival (The Steve Pope, Robert Bradley & The Kicker, Surpass & Hootenauer)	July 23	Billy Ray Cyrus & Emmy Cochran
Aug 1	The Rippingtons, David Benoit & Jean-Luc Ponty	Aug 2	Trudy Jost Dance Company	Aug 4	Ersta Hakola 2002 (Come 4 times, See the bands & the lights)	Aug 6	Michael Bolton
Aug 8	Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons, Felix Cavaliere & The Rascals, Lou Christie and The Association	Aug 9	1964 Tribute-Salute to the Beatles	Aug 14	Franklin the Turtle * 11am & 7pm	Aug 15	Al Green & Ann Nesby
Aug 16	Paul Anka	Aug 17	The Scintars	Aug 23	Hank Williams Jr. & Trick Pony	Aug 25	George Benson & Natalie Cole
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