

# Tim Allen likes story-driven movies

BY KURT ANTHONY KRUG  
CORRESPONDENT

The *Santa Clause 2* almost didn't get made. According to Tim Allen, who reprises his role as Scott Calvin, the man who becomes Santa Claus in 1994's *The Santa Clause*, there were many issues with the story and the direction it took.

"It took a long time to make (the sequel) because it started off with the worst of intents: To make money," said Allen, 49, a former resident of Birmingham alumnus of Western Michigan University. Allen, director Michael Lembeck and other cast members met reporters in Dearborn earlier this month to talk about the film.

"It was so evident to me and I didn't want to do this just to make money because it's just such a sweet story to begin with." Allen and his partners at Boing Cat, the comedian/actor's film company, pitched a script to Disney, whose Buena Vista studios made *The Santa Clause 2*. In it, Allen's character leaves the North Pole in order to deal with his son Charlie's descent into juvenile delinquency.

"Disney didn't like (the script) because the story was too big, too broad, too dangerous. There were so many elements they were afraid of, I.e.,

they didn't want the kid to be in trouble. (They didn't like) Santa with a bad child. (Lembeck) came aboard about the fifth draft in and it was close, yet Disney still didn't like this, didn't like that. Eventually, I said, 'Look, I think we're making two different movies here. You want to make a movie that's more like *Scrooby Doo* or something that's really more of a vehicle to sell products. I said, 'Let's just say no, so we pulled out.'"

## SAVING THE FILM

However, before the flame could fully die out, he, Lembeck, and his film company put everything they liked about the script on a bulletin board and concluded they still had a story to tell. Writers John J. Strauss and Ed Decker rewrote the script and a happy medium with Disney was eventually reached.

Allen had some input into certain elements of the script. "I just wanted to make sure I had a problem with my boy," he said. "I fought it and got to the point where Disney allowed Charlie to be the naughty, just not as naughty as I wanted it. I wanted him to be mad at me and acting out, and I would have to parent him because otherwise there's no point to the story." Charlie spray paints pro-Christmas graffiti on his school,

protesting its lack of holiday decorations. "I enjoy movies. But I also enjoy movies with a story...I'm very proprietary about characters: Santa Claus, Buzz Lightyear (the animated character in *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2* whose voice Allen provided)," he said. "This is Santa Claus we're talking about here. You're messing with a children's icon. He's a messenger of hope and he has a religious significance because he's tied to Christ's birthday." There is no mention of Jesus' birthday in the film, yet Allen and Lembeck wanted to send a message about the true meaning of Christmas without playing the religious angle.

"I wanted real genuine, grounded emotional content," Lembeck said. "It definitely supports the drama because without it, there is no comedy. Secondly, there are huge themes in this, having to do with faith and belief and loss of love. This is really important to me."

"We have the icon—Santa Claus—representing (goodness and kindness), but more importantly, we have genuine emotion. Tim as Santa is so kind and represents so much goodness, yet is still a father and has to balance family and work. How does somebody do that? There's not an adult, in the theater who can't relate to that."

# Santa Clause 2 actress values importance of family

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Elizabeth Mitchell, best known for her roles in the 2000 feature film *Frequency* and TV's *ER* considers herself a traditional person; it's just her line of work that isn't. "I'm very family-oriented," the actress said, during an interview earlier this month at the Ritz Carlton in Dearborn. Mitchell, 32, a Dallas, TX native is the eldest of three daughters.



Mitchell

"(My favorite Christmas memories) are in that one moment right before you go into the family room on Christmas morning and see your loved ones. The family part of Christmas is the part I'm in love with."

Mitchell's latest role is Mrs. Claus opposite comedian Tim Allen as Santa Claus in *The Santa Clause 2*. It is the sequel to the 1994 original, *The Santa Clause*.

Mitchell, the new face in a returning cast, said director Michael Lembeck had a clear vision of how her character would develop during the course of the movie.

"The people I was with were such high caliber that I couldn't help but think a little bit would rub off on me, so that made it easier," she says.

Mitchell has nothing but high praise for Tim Allen. "Tim's so good. He's so funny. He's just

FABULOUS! He was a genius in *Galaxy Quest* (the 1999 sci-fi spoof of *Star Trek*)."

The actress, who holds a bachelor of fine arts degree from Stephens College, has studied at the British American Drama Academy, spent six years at the respected Dallas Theatre Company, including one year with the theatre's Encore Company, is attracted to playing strong roles.

Mitchell portrayed Linda McCartney, the late wife of ex-Beatle Paul McCartney in the 2000 television epic, *The Linda McCartney Story*. However, the actress wishes the movie focused more on McCartney's life, which she calls "extraordinary and such a triumph," rather than her death, which was in 1998.

"I was offered the role and I didn't feel I could turn it down, but it made me feel terrible to take (the part) because it was filmed) so soon after these people lost their mother" she explained.

"I didn't think of it at the time, of course, because I just thought she was so amazing."

Right now, Mitchell feels she needs a much-needed break after starring in three movies (*The Santa Clause 2*, *Hollywood Palms*, and *Double Bang*) and two TV series. She plans to take a long vacation in Europe, somewhere she always wanted to go when she was younger but couldn't afford.

In regards to having any "movie star" dreams, Mitchell keeps everything in perspective.

"I don't really think that way. I'm always waking up, going, 'I can't believe this.'"

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