

Arts & Entertainment



Animation veteran Schouten driving force behind new kids' series for Family Channel

By STEVE LeBLANC
The Champion

Animators don't schmooz with late-night television hosts, find themselves on magazine covers or draw millions of dollars for individual projects.

However, they can be compared to big-time movie stars in at least one regard. To truly succeed in the world of animation, globetrotting eventually becomes a necessity.

Native Miltonian Chris Schouten is a prime example of that. In order to ensure job security and stay on the cutting edge of his chosen profession, the cook turned commercial artist has ventured to such far-off places as China, Japan and Hungary.

"It's (travel) a pretty common requirement, especially to better oneself," said the 45-year-old, who was born and raised locally. "You can never stop learning, and often that forces you to move — begrudgingly sometimes if you've got a family like me."

Currently, Mr. Schouten finds himself back in Ottawa where he originally broke into the animation scene in the late-'70s. But with roughly a quarter of a century worth of experience, he returned to the nation's capital last year as the furthest thing from a rookie.

In fact, the Sheridan College animation program graduate is now the driving force behind Amberwood Production's *The Secret World of Benjamin Bear* — a 26-episode children's series set to air on The Family Channel in the fall of 2004.

Having begun full-scale production just last week, Mr. Schouten and a crew of nearly two dozen animators are in the early stages of bringing to life the original vision of Amberwood owner and executive director Sheldon Wiseman, who was inspired by the classic children's song *Teddy Bear Picnic*.

"This should keep us busy for the next year," explained Mr. Schouten, who has worked on such well-known projects as *Inspector Gadget* and *Batman — The Dark Knight*. "I'm basically responsible for every detail of production, but I think I'm up to the challenge."

While holding down the director's chair isn't exactly commonplace for Mr. Schouten, he has worn the mantle of leadership before — and has



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certainly learned a lot from industry icons like Don Bluth.

The two worked side by side through the mid-'90s, highlighting their partnership with the production of *Anastasia* — 20th Century Fox's first full-length animation feature film that delighted

audiences in 1997. "He taught me a lot," stressed Mr. Schouten. • see TECHNOLOGY on page 11

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Hearthside series will continue with swing music event Feb. 8

Romance will be in the air at Halton Region Museum Saturday, Feb. 8.

Together with AM740 prime time radio, the museum foundation will present a pre-Valentine's Day evening — *Hearthside Dinner and Music Series* — at 7 p.m.

The fund-raising event will begin

with a buffet-style dinner, followed by a performance by George Grosman and Swing Noir — who play a mix of 1920s and '30s jazz and ethnic swing music.

In its fifth year, the music series is one of a number of initiatives that the foundation has established to assist with the ongoing renova-

tions and artifacts preservation at the Halton Region Museum, located at Kelso Conservation Area.

Tickets for the event cost \$35 a person and can be purchased by calling (905) 875-2200, ext. 0 or by visiting the Region's Web site at www.region.halton.on.ca/museum.

Q: Why did the chicken cross the road?



A: To live longer.

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