

ARTS

Calling Spielberg

Does movie legend's offer still stand?

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

What would you do if you found yourself face to face with legendary moviemaker Steven Spielberg? Ask for his autograph? Pitch an idea? Pay him a compliment?

Claudio DiFede knows how he'd react, because that's the very situation the film producer found himself in — twice — 15 years ago, once at an L.A. awards show where he boldly told Spielberg they were destined to work together, and then at an Oscars after-party.

To get to that point is a story on its own. After all, they don't let just anybody into those red carpet soirees. And, well, they didn't exactly let DiFede in; the seemingly invincible 23-year-old snuck in.

In any event, they were two memorable encounters. Even more significant was the comment from Spielberg that resulted: "Sure, why not kid, give me a call."

But for some reason, DiFede didn't. He let the opportunity pass by as the responsibilities of life — namely, marriage and family — took over. His desire to make a truly great movie got shoved into the background.

Now, as a husband and father of a two-year-old daughter, he's ready to take back his dreams and find out if it's possible to make good on them after such a long passage of time. He's going to attempt to pick up where he left off and make that call to Spielberg.

Ready to revisit movie-making passion

"I've built a solid foundation of family and now I'm ready to take on what I left behind," the now Milton resident told the *Champion*.

Along the way, his attempts will be videotaped and the journey captured in a docu-drama aptly named *Calling Spielberg*.

The film will explore the tug-of-war between lofty dreams and everyday life, explained DiFede, a graduate of the American Film Institute.

If he's able to arrange a meeting with Spielberg, that'll definitely be the climax of the movie. But it'll also track the journey and what it was that prevented him from making the call in the first place.

He's already managed to negotiate a short interview with Spielberg's mother in return for a review of her restaurant.

So just how did DiFede come face to face with the movie giant anyways?

Scene One, 1994, Los Angeles.

A young DiFede becomes friends with a guy named Robert Medema, who's also in the business and regularly sneaks into awards shows. When the People's Choice Awards rolls around, DiFede is his sidekick and the pair makes it in, no questions asked.

DiFede stands near the back of the stage while Spielberg accepts the Favorite Motion Picture award for Jurassic Park. He approaches Spielberg as he steps off the stage, shakes his hand and introduces himself, adding, "You can take it to the bank, you and I are going to work together one day."

Spielberg smiles and replies: "Sure, kid, why not."

Three months later, this time with Medema, Miss USA 1994 and another woman, DiFede manages to get into the Oscars' Governor's Ball, a swanky party following the Academy Awards.

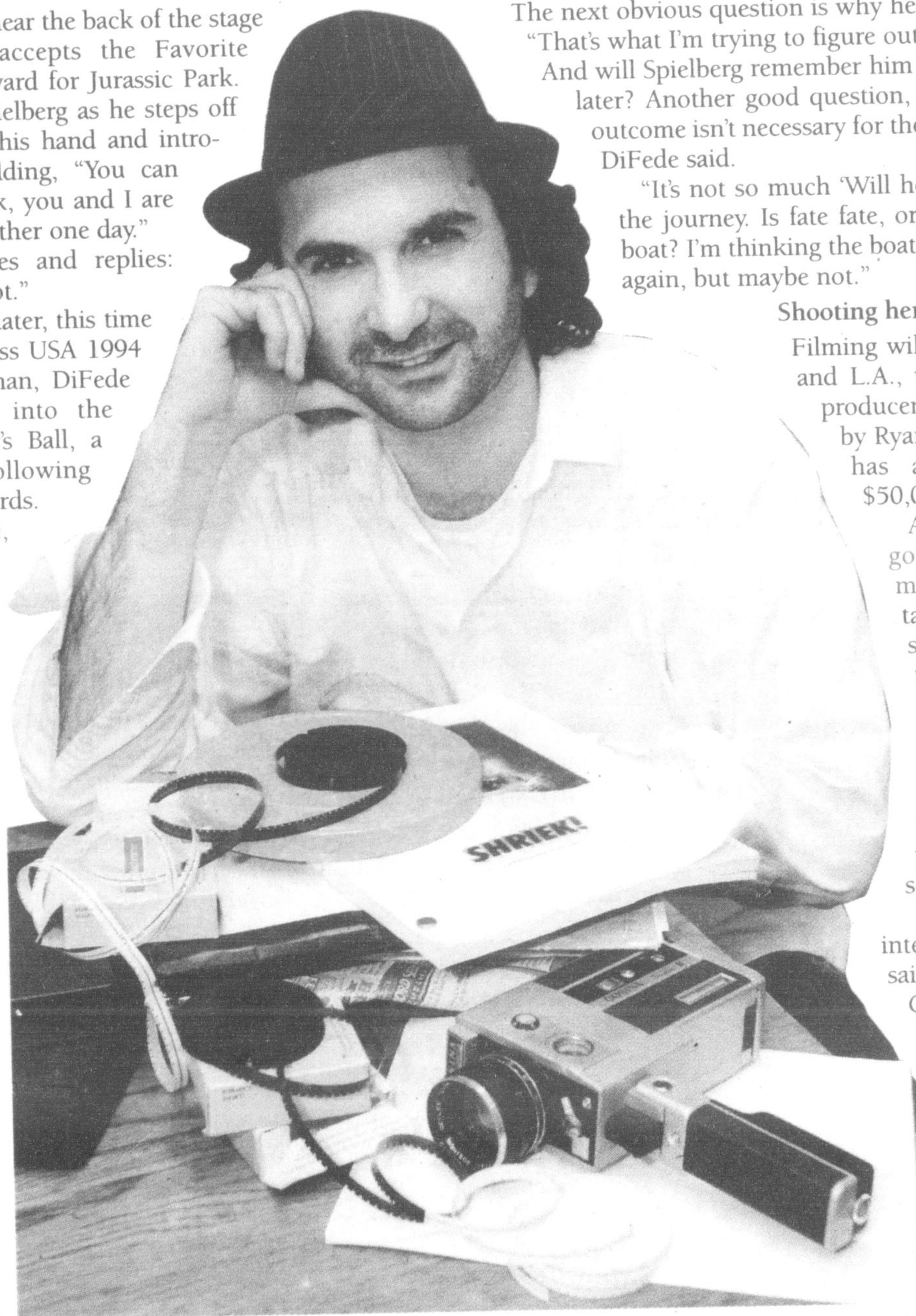
Once inside, DiFede spots Spielberg and waits his turn to speak with him. When that comes, surprisingly, Spielberg remembers him.

DiFede casually asks, "So, when can I call you?" Spielberg replies he's taking a few months off with his family, and to call him after that.

DiFede asks if he's going to remember him, to which Spielberg replies: "Claudio, how could I forget you?"

Just how did DiFede managed to get into these two high-security events?

"He (Medema) has his methods," DiFede said — methods that include going inside and picking up unattended tickets to bring outside to the awaiting trio. "Once you get a tuxedo and put a red ribbon in it (for AIDS awareness) nobody says boo to you."



The next obvious question is why he didn't call.

"That's what I'm trying to figure out," DiFede said.

And will Spielberg remember him a decade-and-a-half later? Another good question, although a positive outcome isn't necessary for the success of the film, DiFede said.

"It's not so much 'Will he remember me,' it's the journey. Is fate fate, or did I just miss the boat? I'm thinking the boat might come around again, but maybe not."

Shooting here and in L.A.

Filming will be done in Milton and L.A., with Medema a co-producer. It's being directed by Ryan Green. The project has a slim budget of \$50,000.

As for just how he's going to attempt to make this elusive contact remains to be seen, but DiFede said there'll be no "stalker" components to his attempts.

Speaking from L.A., Green said he was drawn to the project for a few reasons.

"I find Claudio an interesting subject," he said. "I can imagine the Claudio of decades past that would've perpetrated these deeds."

The film pits idealism against practicality and responsibilities, an interesting topic to which many people can relate.

"These two are at war (within

DiFede)," Green said, adding, "This is his major effort to reclaim something that was lost."

DiFede hopes the film will be finished by summer's end. "I am not sure what to expect but I know I'm ready."

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