

Filming 'Neverland'



By BRICE HABEGER
FOR THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

In stories by J.M. Barrie, Neverland is the imagined world where no one grows up, and a happy thought and some fairy dust can make you fly.

But Absinthe Films' "Neverland," premiering tonight at 8 p.m. at Centennial Hall, isn't a fantasy tale. It's a 16mm, epic snowboard film shot in Alaska and around the globe.

The sky touching here won't be done by little boys in their pajamas; it will be done by the best snowboarding professionals on the planet. These pros don't use pixie dust — they use sheer guts to launch corked rotations off cornices so high that it might cause the Lost Boys to contemplate retirement.

Last winter, the search for monster jumps and insane descents brought the crew to Southeast, for two months of shooting and riding in the mountains around Juneau. During this time, they shot 4,000 feet of film, made close to 100 descents, and even ripped some of the 400+ inches of powder at Eaglecrest.

Justin Hostynek is part of the creative team behind Absinthe Films and holds the title of co-owner, filmer, and editor. With more than a decade of experience and having shot more than ten films, he knows there is nothing magical about bringing the sport's top talent together to create the film.

First and foremost, he must answer to Old Man Winter's snowy wanderings.

"Flexibility is always the best plan. You can try to coax the whole ship in one direction or another, but a film of this magnitude charts its own direction," he said. "I have seen so many companies try to lay down the law and plan a strict schedule that usually falls apart."

With this film, he thought it was best to steer away from the recent trend of bringing slick, Hollywood-style camera techniques to the world of snowboard filmmaking.

"There are too many dolly-camera moves and gyro-stabilized shots in the other films. I wish some of the other filmmakers could exercise some restraint, instead of finding a good thing and overdoing it."

As with all of his films, "Neverland," started off as a single word, a "small seed of an idea," and through careful "nurturing and pruning" of the shots and tricks, it grew into something that he describes as a "soulful flowing film (and not) a Hollywood production."

During the winter season, that word guides the company's crew of filers as they set out to capture the tricks and lines that will shape the following year's release.

"What I aim to do is chose a word each year that is unlike anything we or anyone else in snowboarding has done before."

For Hostynek, a snowboard film needs to resonate with its audience. The word, that eventually becomes the title, is a reflection of the snowboard lifestyle "on more than one level," and defines Absinthe's passion to push the progression of the sport and its filmmaking.

This inspiration comes from looking at the mountains as a "challenge." With this comes an appreciation for the nature that defines the sport. It is this appreciation that Hostynek and the rest of the filers hope to capture. For Absinthe, environmental awareness isn't just a green philosophy; it's paying close attention to the natural world where the action takes place.

"We shoot landscapes and cityscapes as much as we are filming the riding," Hostynek mused. "We love being outdoors and it is only natural to see beauty in what you love. An extension of this is wanting to show the (film) to others in hopes of igniting something in the people around us."

It doesn't take much to look at the mountains around Juneau and see them as world-class, but to turn them into a canvas where the world's best riders carve their mark in snowboarding's history — that requires something special.

Effort and guts are the main components, but they alone won't do.

It takes that spark; that special something that can make you fly — and that can be found anywhere you look — imagination.

"Juneau is a portal to Neverland. A perfect example of a far-off land that is right around the corner, if you insist on getting there."

• Brice Habeger is a filmmaker and a snowboarder. He can be reached at bhabeger@hotmail.com.

COURTESY OF TIM ZIMMERMAN

Above: Snowboarder Travis Rice.

Know and go

What: Absinthe Films' "Neverland" premiere.

When: 8 p.m. tonight.

Where: Centennial Hall.

Details: Tickets, \$10. Visit www.absinthe-films.com.

'Black Winter' to premiere Saturday

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"Black Winter," Standard Films' 2009 snowboard film, will premiere in Juneau at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26 at the Juneau Arts & Culture Center. Tickets are \$5 at the door.

The movie, filmed in Alaska, Norway, Iceland, California, Utah, Switzerland and Canada, features world-class riders that include Juneau-raised Mark Landvik. Other featured riders are Halldor Helgason from Iceland, Torstein Horgmo from Norway, Jason Dubois from Quebec City and Lonnie Kauk of Mammoth Lakes, and more.

The event is sponsored by Standard Films and Troxels and will benefit snowboarders Jake and Crystal Liska, to help pay their recent medivac and hospital bills.