

By Josh Premako  
Signal Senior Writer  
jpremako@the-signal.com  
661-259-1234 x519



Producer Harvey Lowry, left, director Todd Tucker, center, and line producer Seth William-Meier, far right, watch as a scene from their upcoming family production 'Monster Mutt' is filmed in the former Borax building in Valencia on Tuesday afternoon. Francisca Rivas (The Signal)

## The dog days of filming

Local effects gurus produce family film

Two local filmmakers are looking to the past to craft something new.

With "Monster Mutt," director Todd Tucker and producer Harvey Lowry are trying to create a film that recalls the early days of directors like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas.

"It's all about making movies kids can see," said Lowry, an Acton resident.

"This is a movie that I would have wanted to see when I was a kid," said Tucker, who lives in Valencia and wrote the original story on which the screenplay is based.

"We wanted to go old-school (and make) something any family in the world would want to show their kids."

He cited films including "the Wizard of Oz," "ET: the Extra-Terrestrial" and "Gremlins" as early influences.

"It's recreating worlds - fantasy worlds you can escape to," he said of the filmmaking process.

"Monster Mutt" is a family comedy that tells the story of a family dog kidnapped by an evil corporation and used as a test subject for a new energy drink, which transforms the dog into the titular character as the family tries to find a cure.

Lowry and Tucker are hoping for a theatrical release in winter or spring 2010.

This is the third film being produced by Green Pictures, an offshoot of special-effects house Drac Studios, helmed by Lowry, Tucker and Greg Cannom.

Their hope is to eventually produce between four and six films per year while still working their magic at Drac Studios.

Drac Studios boasts an extensive resume, including a 2009 Oscar for effects work on the David Fincher film, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

The award was an aid in securing funding for "Monster Mutt," Lowry said.

Because Drac Studios is doing all the effects work for the film, he said the final price tag will probably be about half what it would be if an outside company were hired.

Despite backgrounds in special-effects work, both Tucker and Lowry said filmmaking has been a longtime goal, and one with constant benefits.

"Mostly, it's not a job, it's just something that we love doing," Lowry said Tuesday, while Tucker wrapped up a scene in the bowels of the former U.S. Borax building on Tourney Road in Valencia.

While computer-generated effects have become a staple of the film industry, Drac Studios' hallmark is making use of realistic puppets and models, balanced out with a bit of CGI.

"Monster Mutt" is no exception. Lowry described the movie's beast as a "giant, Clifford-type animatronic dog," which requires five people to operate.

"We're trying to use as little digital as possible," he said.

One of the challenges in making the film, Tucker said, was coming up with a believable monster dog that wasn't too scary for kids.

The film is being shot completely within the city of Santa Clarita, and Tucker, Lowry and line producer Seth William Meier had nothing but good things to say about working with the city's film office.

Additionally, Lowry said the production commandeered Tucker's neighborhood for several days of shooting and wound up using several local kids as extras.

"This place films amazingly," Tucker said of Santa Clarita.

<http://www.the-signal.com/news/article/16005/>