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**Family-friendly Flicks
Todd Thompson dons his filmmaker hat behind the camera lens.**

By Cindy Barth

Todd Thompson fell in love with filmmaking at the young age of 8, when he created his first movie using his grandfather's 8 mm camera and a bunch of Star Wars action figures.

While he didn't really pursue that passion with vigor until after he graduated from the University of Akron in 1994 with a degree in advertising and marketing, the 6-foot-plus filmmaker today has crafted a series of films that are winning his Celebration-based production company accolades on all fronts.

"He is one of the best things to happen to the Orlando filmmaking community," says Suzy Allen, vice president of film and digital media production with the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission. "The short films he's done are incredible and heart-warming. He creates those kinds of films that everyone can relate to."

Among his most recent endeavors are two short films, *Time & Again* and *Once Not Far From Home*, that are part of series of films Thompson plans to package together.

Time & Again featured Academy Award-nominee Seymour Cassel and won numerous awards from film festivals across the country. The film tells the story of a watchmaker whose wife now lies terminally ill in their upstairs bedroom. On the day of their 53rd wedding anniversary, the old watchmaker surprises his wife with an old clock he has repaired – one that he soon learns allows him to control time. Unable to afford the treatment needed to get his wife well, the watchmaker uses the clock to win the lottery, only to discover that even though he can control time, destiny has a mind of its own.

Once Not Far From Home, which starred *Malcolm in the Middle*'s Erik Per Sullivan, did equally as good as far as awards, taking home, among other things, eight Crystal Reels, Florida's most prestigious entertainment award. *Once Not Far From Home* – which also starred Skye McCole Bartusiak (*The Patriot*), Daniel Hugh Kelly (*Star Trek: Insurrection*) and veteran actor James Best (*The Dukes of Hazzard*) – explores the notion of true love between a curious little boy, a beautiful young girl and a mysterious old house that holds the secrets to their love and fate.

Yet even with his current success in getting projects on film and screened, Thompson's road to filmmaking success was not exactly a straight path. His return to an active filmmaking role was rekindled in 1995, when Thompson, who currently is a creative development manager with Walt Disney Parks & Resorts, relocated

to Orlando to pursue a career with Disney. That same year, a friend talked him into landing a role as an extra on the Roseanne TV series.

“I was hooked forever on filmmaking,” says Thompson, whose other personal credits on-camera include parts in the movies *Rosewood*, *The Waterboy* and *The Green Mile*, as well as roles in *From the Earth to the Moon* and two episodes of *Dawson’s Creek*.

In 1999, he co-founded Stars North with partner Balinda DeSantis. A few years later, Kathryn Ruscio Kelly and Smithy Sipes came on-board as well.

Today, in his off-work hours, weekends and spare time, Thompson’s Celebration-based production company continues to work on short films and other moviemaking projects. He and his partners are heavily involved in the local independent filmmaking community, and when they have a project ready to go, they always bring local crew members on-board to help them in their projects.

“It’s our way of helping the local filmmaking community have opportunities to work on their craft and get screen credits,” says Thompson.

And even though his life has gotten a bit more hectic lately thanks to the birth of his first child late last year, “Filmmaking is certainly something I can’t ever imagine giving up.”

For more information about Todd Thompson and Stars North, please visit
www.starsnorth.com