



THE STUNTMAN

Wahkiakum resident reflects on exciting Hollywood career

By PATRICK WEBB
For the Observer

'I PUT MY PHYSICAL WELL BEING ON THE LINE SO THEY CAN BE SAFE.'

— Jeff Jensen, Retired stuntman

CATHLAMET — Call it the stuntman's curse. After a successful Hollywood career, standing in for tough guys Sean Connery and Dolph Lundgren, falling off buildings, crashing cars and blowing things up, Jeff Jensen would always do one more stunt.

"It's difficult to turn down Steven Spielberg," he laughed. "I should have stopped before I was forced to stop. It's like being a pro football player for 30 years. Your body is being hammered. It takes a toll. But it's all relationships and ego."

Jensen's stunts appear in movies including Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1990 sci-fi classic "Total Recall" and "Speed," the 1994 Sandra Bullock bomb-on-a-bus drama.

Stuntman, director takes pains for success

But creating thrills for cinema-goers came at a cost. Some 17 surgeries on a misshapen knee that bulges through his jeans, plus ugly burn scars on both his forearms, attest to a life of falling from bikes and buildings or handling flames and explosives.

At 63, he has had to retire.

As he drove his motor home north from California, Jensen parked in

Kelso and jumped on his motorcycle. Riding west through Wahkiakum County, he discovered his new home. He described scenic Washington Highway 4 as spectacular. "I said, 'I want to live here.'"

Now settled, Jensen is embarked on his new project. He has started a foundation called Soldiers to Cinema, using his Hollywood contacts to train disabled veterans for jobs on movie sets. (See related story.)

Size counts

His story began with a pre-teen boy admiring Steve McQueen in the 1971 motocross documentary "On Any Sunday." Jensen grew up in California's Orange County, racing motorcycles and cars through his teens then getting into the construction industry, building homes for such notables as California Angels star Rod Carew.

In Hawaii, he observed Jack Lord's crew filming "Hawaii 5-0." "I saw them doing motorcycle stunts and thought, 'I could do that.'"

Jensen had already earned his Screen Actors Guild credential filming a commercial for Yamaha. He moved to Los Angeles to break into Hollywood.

At 6-5 tall, he had an advantage. "There were three other big guys. The only other guys my size were old cowboys and they'd say, 'Let the kid do it.' I was very fortunate and my career took off."

Learning the trade

Jensen thirsted to learn every aspect. "From Day 1 in the film industry, I was wanting to direct and would like that job," he said.

He enrolled in the University of Southern California film school. On days when stunts were not required, he returned to the set, observed directors and helped out. His career advanced by earning credentials with the Stuntmen's Association of Motion Pictures and the Actors Studio in New York.

He savored travel to exotic locales. "I have been on every continent except South America, even under the polar ice cap. The places that they paid me to go! I had the most amazing career. But my injuries caught up with me."

Early stunt work was on TV shows like "Walker, Texas Ranger," as well as Chuck Norris' 1983 movie "Lone Wolf



PHOTOS COURTESY JEFF JENSEN

ABOVE: Sean Connery, left, is pictured with stuntman Jeff Jensen wearing identical costumes on the set of director Brian DePalma's 1987 movie "The Untouchables." Connery played Irish-American veteran cop Jimmy Malone who helps Eliot Ness (Kevin Costner) bring down Al Capone.

TOP PHOTO: Jeff Jensen falls off a seven-story building in the TV show "The Fall Guy." The Lee Majors show, about a stuntman/bounty hunter, aired in the early 1980s. Injuries and multiple surgeries on his knee ended Jensen's career as a stuntman and he admits he should have taken more care of his body.

Foundation promotes movie careers for disabled vets

By PATRICK WEBB
For the Observer

CATHLAMET — Jeff Jensen believes his latest project is "giving back."

After a long career as a Hollywood movie and TV stuntman, he has retired. Now he is putting all his energy into a foundation, called Soldier To Cinema. It is designed to help disabled military veterans train for jobs in the film industry.

"There are kids coming back from the desert with disabilities and haven't had their lives yet, but they are missing arms and legs," he said.

The project draws on Jensen's many Hollywood contacts and his board of directors are people with professional skills from occupational therapists and pain management specialists. A combat-wounded U.S. Marine Corps veteran from the Vietnam era and other film industry personnel are among supporters.

Details are available online at www.soldiertocinema.org, which has a link for donations.

"We want to have them train on a real

movie, doing the set, camera, grip, transportation," he said. The concept is to provide paying jobs and training. He is also working to encourage the various industry unions to "fast track" the veterans.

He said he has eight scripts available and hopes to offer vocational training opportunities in every job in film making. These jobs are listed on the web site.

Jensen said his life of make-believe fighting in movies pales compared with the real experiences of American military personnel.

"I have been 'killed' in every war America has ever fought," he smiled, "but these young people are the heroes. The stuff they did was real bad ass. I just faked it."

He said the potential satisfaction from the project is immeasurable.

"It's getting me such a reward," he said. "It will be a lease on life for a vet that has given up a part of his body for our freedom."

If successful, he hopes to expand the program to benefit injured first responders.



'These young people are the heroes' — Jeff Jensen, retired stunt man describing disabled veterans

MORE INFORMATION: www.soldiertocinema.org

Save money and help the planet with sustainable garden practices

By KYM POKORNY
OSU

CORVALLIS — In a world of increasing climate change and the invasion of more exotic insects and pests, sustainable gardening is more important than ever.

We can all do our part to help by changing our practices — often just by a bit, depending on the methods you've already put in place. And if it all seems too overwhelming, take it one step at a time. You'll help the environment and at the same time save money and join a community of like-minded gardeners who love to share their experiences.

To get you started or to increase your repertoire of sustainable practices, consider these suggestions by Oregon State University Extension Service horticulturists.

Check your property for invasive weeds: An invasive species is an introduced organism that negatively alters its new environment. In the Pacific Northwest, there are many invasive plants that meet this definition. Evergreen blackberry, tree-of-heaven, invasive knotweeds, garlic mustard, lesser celandine, Italian arum and horsetail are some examples that are difficult to control. Keep these and other invasive weeds from estab-

lishing on your property. Monitor for invasive plants and take action before they become a bigger problem. In Washington state, check with the Noxious Weed Control Board (www.nwcb.wa.gov) to learn which invasive plants are a problem in your area. Use cultural methods of control before turning to pesticides. — *Weston Miller, OSU Extension horticulturist*

Home orchard care: The sustainable home orchard starts with the selection of size-controlling rootstocks. Tree size can be maintained between 6-9 feet tall when using dwarf or semi-dwarf rootstocks. Smaller trees make it easier to develop an open form that will dry quickly after rains reducing incidence of disease. Small trees are also easier to work with when pruning, thinning, spraying and picking, saving you time throughout the year. They require less spray, plus allow easy access to the upper tree canopy helping to keep sprays on target.

Look through catalogs and publications for tree fruit varieties that do well in the Pacific Northwest by resisting common diseases. (catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/ec819.pdf) For example, when planting a Liberty or Chehalis



Tansy may seem like a pretty summer wildflower, but it is a noxious weed and should be properly disposed of to keep its seeds from germinating.

apple you will never need to spray fungicides to control apple scab because they are highly resistant. — *Steve Renquist, OSU Extension horticulturist*

Plant a cover crop: Soil is the basis of any garden, especially sustainable ones when you don't want to use a lot of chemical fertilizer. Cover crops provide many benefits to the soil by reducing erosion and runoff, increasing water infiltration and increasing organic matter.

Legume cover crops act as a fertilizer and fix nitrogen into the soil. See this publication from Washington State University Extension Service. — *Erica Chernoh, OSU Extension horticulturist*

Share tools: There's no need to purchase your own specialty tools or small equipment (think long-handled branch pruners, lawn edgers or rototillers). See if there is a community tool sharing program in your area or reach out to your neighbors to share. If you need your own, check for used items at estate sales or a home improvement donation store.

Ditch the plastic: Join forces with close neighbors to order soil, compost, mulch or other amendments in bulk instead of purchasing plastic bagged product. — *Brooke Edmunds, OSU Extension horticulturist*

Reduce single-use plastic pots in the garden by:

- Starting seeds at home in cardboard egg cartons, toilet paper tubes or even homemade newspaper pots;
- If you want to start seed in larger containers, look to repurpose plastic tubs or containers from home (repurposed yogurt containers work well);
- Buy bare root plants;

• At the nursery, look for pots made from compostable materials like coir, paper or cow manure. — *Gail Langellotto, OSE Extension Master Gardener statewide coordinator and professor of horticulture*

Reduce pesticide use: Replace pest-prone plants with ones that don't require frequent pesticide use.

Learn more about the particular pests in your garden, and seek alternative methods of control.

Recognize that some pest problems might be an issue of perspective and tolerance. Is there any space or room for you to tolerate light aesthetic damage on particular plants, that will not cause long-term harm to plant health.

If you have a lawn or landscape maintenance service, and they spray pesticides as a regular part of that service, make sure you know the pests that they are spraying for. Educate yourself to find alternatives, or to see if pesticide applications are even needed. Some services will spray at a regular interval (i.e., every two weeks or every month), whether it is needed, or not. — *Gail Langellotto, OSE Extension Master Gardener statewide coordinator and professor of horticulture*

Stuntman: 'The worse thing you can do is hit an actor'

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McQuade." He fell off a seven-story building in "The Fall Guy," and appeared in episodes of "Falcon Crest," "Knight Rider" and "Magnum, P.I." He fought with Jackie Chan on "Cannonball Run 2" in 1984 and Sylvester Stallone in the 1989 "Rambo III" movie, where he was second-unit director. That year he performed stunts in "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" with Harrison Ford.

Fighting — or pretending to fight — meant developing eye and hand coordination to effectively "pull punches."

"The worse thing you can do is hit an actor or hit the camera," he said. "Fighting is all choreography for the camera. It's all rehearsing, blocking. It is all a big con."

On rare occasions where performers actually hit Jensen, he made sure he was paid extra.

Another inside secret is how stunt coordinators plan car chases and crashes. Jensen is amused to reveal how they use tiny "Matchbox" toy cars to help multiple drivers learn their moves before they did the real thing for the rolling camera. "We are creating illusions, we are not crashing," he said.

Doubling for the stars

Jensen cherishes memories of working with big-name stars, especially those who recognized his skill. "I put my physical well being on the line so they can be safe," he said. A treasured 1987 snapshot from the set of "The Untouchables" shows Sean Connery and his double — Jensen, with identical costume and mustache. Another shows him with Donald Sutherland, who he describes as "very thoughtful."

The contrast in scenes ran the gamut. In "Running Man" in 1987 with Schwarzenegger, he was a motorcycle rider who attacked brandishing chainsaws then flew over the handlebars. Doubling for John Goodman in the 1994 "Flintstones" movie, meant wearing a dress when Fred put on a disguise.

One spectacular stunt was for Dolph Lundgren's 1992 adventure "Universal Soldier." The scene called for Lundgren's character to Australian rappel (standing, facing down) 650 feet down the Hoover Dam on the Nevada-Arizona border.

"I wore five layers of



PATRICK WEBB

Jeff Jensen said he fell in love with the scenery of Wahkiakum County on a trip north from California and has moved his home base. Now retired after a career as a Hollywood stuntman and movie director, he is setting up a foundation to offer job opportunities to disabled military veterans.

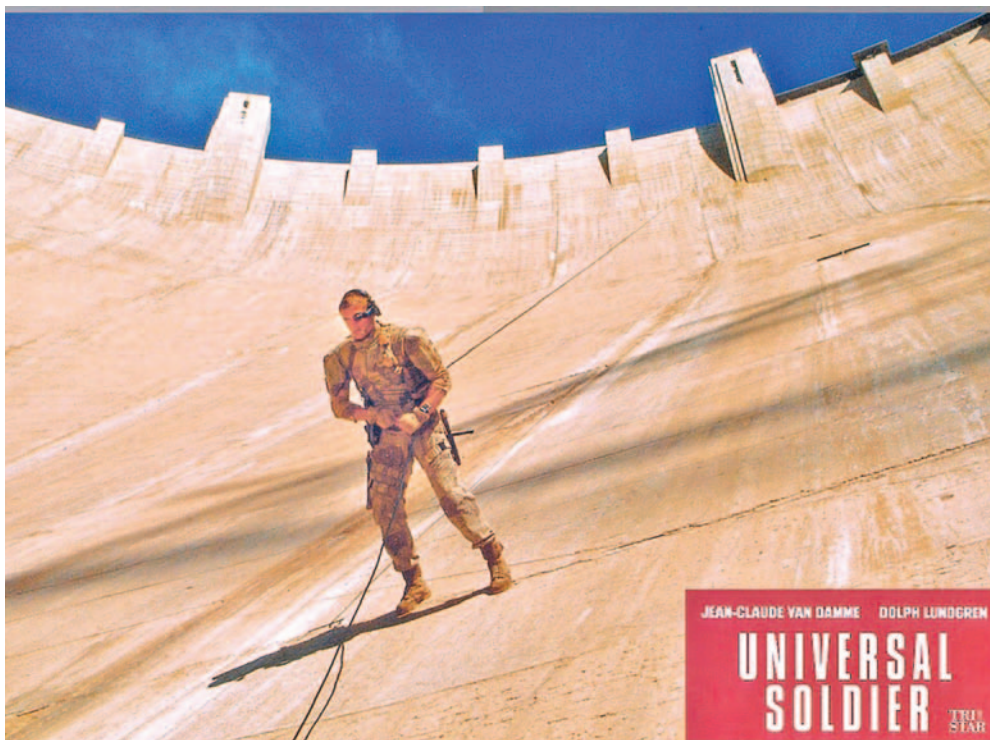


PHOTO COURTESY JEFF JENSEN

A promotional poster for the 1992 adventure movie "Universal Soldier" shows the image of what appears to be Dolph Lundgren on the edge of the Hoover Dam. In fact, Jeff Jensen was the stunt man for the footage shown in the movie, rappelling face-down 650 feet on the sloping surface.

gloves," Jensen said, recalling meticulous preparation that included making sure the rope was long enough. "If I trip and fall, I die. You have to lean out at a 90-degree angle. I did it six times, once with a camera on my head."

Jensen appeared in three of the "Star Trek" movies, but laments the change to CGI (computer generated images) in many of today's films. "I love making movies," he said. "I hate the business of money, it alluding to how money is wasted, "but I love the process."

Blowing things up

He worked as second-unit director for several. "We get to blow up all

the buildings. We are like the 'red-haired stepchildren.' But you have to adapt your style to each director."

Director Peter Master-son's 1991 movie "Convicts" was a 1902 period farm drama by Pulitzer-winning Horton Footestarring Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones.

Jensen was filming Duvall ride his horse to his planned mark, then turn. Jensen said he amazed himself by asking Duvall to do it again, but make sure his character appeared to make a conscious decision to change direction. He was relieved when the seasoned actor agreed to the validity of filming a second take.

"It was my first day on

the set as a union director!" Jensen laughed.

Other second-unit work included "The Indian Runner" (1991), "Subdown" (1997) and "The Watcher" (2000). He directed and wrote the films "Fallacy" (2004) and "Velocity" (2007). The latter highlighted his love of Moto Grand Prix Championship motorcycle racing. "High Speed," which he directed in 2002, was a British motorcycle racing.

No regrets

Jensen is still racing professionally until about five years ago. A 2009 documentary, "The First Last Race" features his love for



PHOTO COURTESY JEFF JENSEN

Jeff Jensen, left, fights with actor Jackie Chan in the 1984 movie "The Cannonball Run 2." Jensen described screen fighting as a well-choreographed "con," designed to convince the camera that a character has been actually hit.

racing, despite his injuries. In an online report, an admirer described in gory detail how he fell off his cycle during the grueling Hill Climb, but insisted on riding his BMW down the steep hill with a broken collar bone. "If I crash, I don't bounce anymore" Jensen quipped.

He isn't happy with the injuries, but has no real regrets. "I had a life of real adrenalin, racing and then stunt work. Film making is a rush," he said, lamenting the need to stop. "I was cut off from the drug of adrenalin."

His father, who died last year, encouraged him. "He taught me to pursue all my dreams. He asked me if I would do it over. The only thing maybe I would start directing full time sooner," Jensen said.

On one shoot, he knew

he was going to need help to continue working so he arranged to visit his orthopedic surgeon between scenes. "I should have stopped doing it," he said. "But you build relationships and don't want to let anyone down."

Satisfaction isn't the only reward. "It is a lifetime of work that keeps paying off," Jensen said. Somewhere in Hollywood, a clerk with a calculator determines "residuals" — additional contracted payments each time a film is shown." Jensen said on one recent night, he turned on his TV and discovered he had eight films being shown. "I just got a stack of 107 residual checks," he laughed. "One was for 8 cents."

He teases that if he ever writes his autobiography, the title will be, "Fall down, pick up check. The life of a Hollywood stuntman."