



Photo by Kate Melton

Media man

At MAGIC Center, director David Long balances student opportunities with professional work

By DIANA LOUISE CARTER

A year ago this month, David L. Long was standing at a podium showing off Rochester Institute of Technology's newest toy – MAGIC Spell Studios, a state-of-the-art studio for creating video games, movies and all kinds of media.

It would have been hard for Long, as a student of chemical engineering in Texas in the 1990s, to imagine that he'd be the director of a film science center and studio at a university in New York 20 years later.

It might have even been hard back then to imagine the need for such a center. MAGIC Center, the building, houses the film-and-animation and game-design departments. It also houses a business, known as MAGIC Spell Studios, that makes available studio facilities to entrepreneurs who might, in turn, provide learning and job opportunities for students.

"The facility is literally what Rochester needed as one of the tools of getting on the map," said filmmaker Aaron Gordon, principal of Open Sky Productions. Rochesterians will be familiar with his work, if not him, because he created the Wegmans 2Go adver-

tisements that are running on television and social media channels right now. He used the studios at the MAGIC Center to create Cleopatra's Nile, Mona Lisa's Italy and the surface of the moon.

"Aaron turned 7,000 square feet in our sound stage into 7,000 square feet of the moon. They built a lunar lander. They worked with a prop company that has a full, functioning space suit," Long said. And what they didn't do? Farm that stuff out to New York or Los Angeles.

The MAGIC facilities woo professionals, but they are also available for students to use before the pros, and with the pros.

"In arts," Long said, "there aren't these giant formal co-op programs in big legacy programs. If you want experience in these disciplines, you've actually got to get on a set. You've got to get into post-production as an apprentice. You've got to go and work on real free-lance projects."

Gordon said Long is the perfect person to head this center, because of his technical knowledge, and understanding of the importance of collaboration in emerging media fields, and his ability to predict emerging job trends.

Long has also achieved some national status in the industry. He was named a fellow of the Society of Motion Picture & Television Engineers in 2017.

The two met when Gordon, a 2013 graduate of RIT, was getting his film degree. Schooled in the artistic side of filmmaking, he turned to Long and his motion picture engineering students to help with the technical aspects of his films.

The one aspect of the MAGIC direc-

tor's job that Long might have imagined 20 years ago was the academic setting. Growing up in Oklahoma, he had witnessed his grandfather moving back and forth between jobs in the food industry and teaching and researching food science at universities.

"I really liked taking advantage of both. I knew my career would end in academia," Long said recently in his office on the second floor of the MAGIC Center. MAGIC, by the way, stands for Media, Arts, Games, Interaction & Creativity.

Long holds up his academic and career path, which included working at Eastman Kodak Co. for a decade, as an example for students to consider. Despite the career-oriented degrees many get at schools like RIT, Long says students should understand that what they're training for might not be what they end up doing for a career eventually, and they shouldn't stress about that.

"At the end of the four years of undergraduate, you're not done and you've not defined your career trajectory explicitly," Long said.

He admits to not being particularly passionate about his major, chemical engineering, but his bachelor's degree in that subject helped him find his first job where he could start to define his passion. Also, "It gave me the core skills that weren't so engineering-specific," such as problem-solving, he said.

For nine of the 10 years Long was at Kodak, his title was imaging scientist, and he became an expert in motion picture science. Gordon credits Long with the science behind the film stock that defined filmmaking for seven years in the 2000s.

While at Kodak, Long used his educational benefits to obtain a master's degree at the University of Rochester in materials science. Then, he said, "in 2007, this wonderfully serendipitous thing happened:" RIT posted a job as chairman of the motion picture scienc-

David Long

Title: Director of MAGIC Center and MAGIC Spell Studios, Rochester Institute of Technology

Education: Bachelor's degree in chemical engineering, University of Texas, Austin, 1997; master's degree in materials science, University of Rochester, 2001; Ph.D. in color science, RIT, 2015

Residence: Victor

Family: Wife, Karen; daughter Morgan, 15; and son Garrett, 12

Activities: photography, woodworking, shepherding his kids to numerous youth activities

Quote: "At the end of the four years of undergraduate, you're not done and you've not defined your career trajectory explicitly."

es. “Too many good things were falling in my lap at the same time,” Long said. The opportunity allowed him to do the kind of research he hadn’t been able to undertake at Kodak, and he could advance in his field without having to relocate his family, which then included two tiny children. It even shortened his commute. There was just one thing Long had to negotiate – the latitude to embark on a doctorate in color science. He completed the degree at RIT in 2015, three years before he was appointed head of the new MAG-IC center. At a technical institute cum research university famous for its career prepa-

ration programs, Long stands out a bit by telling students to think more broadly than the degree program they enter at RIT. “The reputation of RIT as a career school is fantastic to attract attention and attract applicants,” Long said. “I think we’ve done a better and better job, especially with President (David) Munson lately, of communicating once we’ve got you here — let’s tell you what it’s really about. It’s about becoming a better world citizen, it’s about exploring outside your major.” Long’s an even odder duck compared to advisers in other film programs, some of which advise skipping an aca-

demid degree altogether to get training that can result in an immediate job in the industry. But he has his eye on the longer game, involving creating a local film industry thriving in Rochester and not just feeding into the coastal scenes. “We of course want a lot of high fliers to go to the coasts, to elevate our reputation. But we want a healthy fraction of our community to stick around here and to continue to elevate the media discipline in this part of the country,” he said. “We’ve got the sound stage, post-production, a movie theater, all these things that are critical to a successful media production ecosys-

tem in a market.” Teams of students who want to create media — perhaps a film, perhaps a game — are able to gain real world experience and business experience at RIT. “A film team or a game team wants to make a media experience....That is the seed for the idea for a business. These students are actually founding their own studio or their own creative services company,” Long said. “These students don’t need to flee to the coasts to operate their business. We can show them they can be successful here.” dcarter@bridgetowermedia.com/(585) 363-7275

Rush manufacturer names new leader

By VELVET SPICER

Rush manufacturer Global Precision Products LLC has named Mark Higgins as president and CEO. He succeeds Mark LaBell in the role. Higgins most recently served as president at Omega Tool Measuring Machines and previously was executive vice president of Parlec Inc. He holds a bachelor’s degree in industrial technology from SUNY College at Buffalo and an MBA from Rochester Institute of Technology.

“Mark Higgins is a proven leader who will assist the company in continuing to move the business forward while maintaining our reputation for supplying the highest quality machined components to our customers,” LaBell said in a statement. “Mr. Higgins has the industry experience, the passion for our



Higgins

business and the leadership ability to get us there. We are looking forward to growing this business together with him as our next president and CEO.” LaBell will stay on as the company’s vice president of sales and innovation. “I look forward to working with Mark LaBell and the team at Global Precision Products,” Higgins said. “Mark LaBell and the LaBell family have built an outstanding business that prides itself on putting its customers first. Global Precision Products is an innovative company with

top-notch people, state-of-the-art equipment and a focus on continuous improvement.” Global Precision Products was founded in 1997 and manufactures critical, high-quality precision-machined components and assemblies for customers in the aerospace, defense, test & measurement, medical, optical and imaging and commercial/industrial markets. The company has more than 50 employees. vspicer@bridgetowermedia.com / 585-653-4021

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