Hocus Focus
Visual effects wizard creates on-screen magic

Celebrities ranging from Will Smith, Nicolas Cage, and Julia Roberts owe alumnus Ryan Heniser a debt of gratitude.

Heniser isn’t an accountant, business manager, press agent, or talent scout for Tinseltown royalty. He’s been more of a 21st century make-up artist, perfecting their larger-than-life appearances through visual artistry. He helps them look their best.

Heniser’s “make-up case” is actually a software toolbox where—in conjunction with a variety of programming and scripting languages—the contents closely resemble an eye chart to the layperson: C/C++, TCL, SQL, OTL, PyQt, MEL, and MTOR, to name a few.

Together, these essentials form the foundation for his visual effects work, which creates or amplifies a sense of realism.

Heniser, B.S. ’01, says he recognized his career destiny at a young age. “I’ve dreamed of working on films like Star Wars,” he shares. “When I saw Toy Story for the first time, I knew I wanted to work in that industry.”

And work he has, collaborating on big-budget films such as 2007’s I Am Legend, Surf’s Up, and The Ant Bully. He recently accepted a research and development software engineer position at Industrial Light & Magic. ILM is one of seven divisions at Lucasfilm Ltd., named for founder and film pioneer George Lucas. At ILM, he is working on the proprietary application, Zeno, the organization’s animation pipeline.

Ryan Heniser, B.S. ’01, has enjoyed an up-and-coming career at visual effects and animation studios, having completed work on the movies I Am Legend, Surf’s Up, and The Ant Bully. He recently accepted a research and development software engineer position at Industrial Light & Magic. ILM is one of seven divisions at Lucasfilm Ltd., named for founder and film pioneer George Lucas. At ILM, he is working on the proprietary application, Zeno, the organization’s animation pipeline.

Alumni Events
Explore a number of ways for IPFW alumni and friends to get involved during the next several months.

Teaching Hospitality
Read about IPFW’s new source of pride, which is also the latest addition to IPFW’s classroom space. Hmm... it doesn’t look like an academic building.

Homecoming Honors
Three alumni and two friends of the university were honored at the Homecoming basketball game in November for their various contributions.

Think Pink!
Cheer the Mastodons to victory this February during the second annual Pink Out, an event to promote breast cancer awareness and research.

Volume 12, Number 3, January 2009
Upcoming Alumni Events

Alumni Day with the Mastodons Alumni
Saturday, February 28
Women’s game at 1:30 p.m., Memorial Coliseum
IPFW alumni are encouraged to cheer on the men’s and women’s basketball teams at Alumni Day with the Mastodons. The men and women will take on Summit League rivals, the Southern Utah Thunderbirds. Tickets are being discounted for all alumni and their guests, and one ticket gets you admitted to both games. You will also have the opportunity to shoot a free throw at halftime, with the chance to win an autographed T-shirt from Men’s Basketball Coach Dane File. For ticket information, contact IPFW Athletics Ticket Manager Zach Sweers at 260-481-6372 or by e-mail at sweersz@ipfw.edu. For event information, contact Alumni Relations at 260-481-6807 to reserve your seat today.

Easter Basket Collection March 9–April 3
For the ninth year, the Northeast Indiana Alumni Directors Consortium is seeking wrapped Easter baskets to be given to the children of SCAN clients (Stop Child Abuse and Neglect). This is a great activity for families, church groups, your office, scout troops, and more. Ten Fort Wayne-area colleges and universities join forces each Easter and set a goal to collect more than 800 baskets for these children. Baskets must be commercially packaged (nothing homemade), and your entire basket should be wrapped so that nothing falls out. Drop off the baskets at any area college or university until April 3. At IPFW, you can drop off your baskets at the Ketterle Hall or Walb Student Union information desks or call us at 260-481-6807, and a representative from Alumni Relations will pick up your basket(s) from your car as you drive up to the Walb Student Union semi-circle driveway.

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It’s time for the seventh annual gathering of math alumni and the Department of Mathematical Sciences faculty. Call Alumni Relations at 260-481-6807 to reserve your seat today.

Alumni Pre-Game Reception Friday, April 24, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m., Memorial Coliseum
Fashion expert Clinton Kelly, from TLC’s What Not to Wear, will be the keynote speaker for 2009’s Tapestry: A Day for Women. This annual program provides a day of renewal and self-growth for women of all ages, through educational, motivational, and inspirational activities in an atmosphere of camaraderie. Proceeds raised from the event support the Tapestry Parkview Endowment Fund, which provides scholarships to select IPFW female students majoring in the health or science fields. For more information regarding the event, contact the Tapestry Information Line at 260-481-6554 or tapestry@ipfw.edu. Registration begins February 27.

Tapestry: A Day for Women
March 9–April 3
Fort Wayne-area colleges and universities join forces each Easter and set a goal to collect more than 800 baskets for these children. Baskets must be commercially packaged (nothing homemade), and your entire basket should be wrapped so that nothing falls out. Drop off the baskets at any area college or university until April 3. At IPFW, you can drop off your baskets at the Ketterle Hall or Walb Student Union information desks or call us at 260-481-6807, and a representative from Alumni Relations will pick up your basket(s) from your car as you drive up to the Walb Student Union semi-circle driveway.

IPFW Sponsors Pink Out to Promote Breast Cancer Awareness, Research
IPFW Athletics will paint Memorial Coliseum “pink” again as it sponsors the second annual Pink Out on February 7, as the women’s basketball team takes on the Oral Roberts Golden Eagles at 1:30 p.m. Tickets will be $5; breast cancer survivors will be admitted for free. Pink Out is an NCAA nationwide initiative in conjunction with athletics to support breast cancer awareness and research programs. IPFW’s involvement as a member of The Summit League is meant to localize this awareness campaign. During last year’s inaugural event, the players, along with the opposing team, practiced with pink basketballs and wore long-sleeve, pink T-shirts to commemorate those who lost their battles with breast cancer and to honor breast cancer survivors as well. Additionally, the Mastodons wore custom-designed pink basketball shoes provided by Fred Toenges Shoes and Pedotheics. Spectators showed their support by wearing pink to the game. A portion of the ticket sales, totaling $5,000, was divided evenly between the American Cancer Society and Francine’s Friends Mobile Mammography. IPFW Director of Athletics Tommy Bell anticipates continued success: “We expect an even larger attendance at this year’s event as we honor the survivors of this terrible disease,” he says. “Let’s get out to Pink Out and support this worthy cause.”

Former Mastodons Leave Lasting Imprint
Three highly accomplished student-athletes honored with IPFW Athletic Hall of Fame inclusion in November
Jeff Prak, A.G.S. ’02, B.G.S. ’93, continued the tradition of world-class attackers for men’s volleyball. Prak was named to the All-MIVA three times and was the conference’s Player of the Year in 2003. He was part of the Mastodons’ NCAA Final Four team in 1999 and was named to the All-America in 2003. Professionally, Prak has played in Italy, Cyprus, Brazil, and Puerto Rico. He is currently a member of the Mayaguaz Indians (Indians) in Puerto Rico.

Julie Hefley-Price, A.S. ’88, was a four-year letterwinner in women’s volleyball at IPFW. She was named to the All-Great Lakes Valley Conference in 1986 and 1987. Hefley-Price ranks highly in a number of women’s volleyball statistical categories and was named to the Second Team All-America in 1987.

Jeff Richey, B.G.S. ’01, was a four-year letterwinner in men’s soccer. Richey backstopped the Mastodons to their NCAA Final Four tournament appearance in 1999. He was named to the All-Midwest Region team, and more importantly, All-America. Richey is currently a goalkeeper with the Chicago Storm of the Xtreme Soccer League.
Class Notes

1970
Alan Wemser, A.S., radiography, was promoted to vice president of business banking at Grubb Bank.

1976
Joseph Hoffman, A.A.S., civil technology/B.S., building construction technology (1977), was promoted to service vice president and project manager at Construction Control Inc.

1982
Adrienne Maurer, A.S., computer science/B.S., computer science (1979)/MBA (2000), was elected vice president of the 2008–09 Fort Wayne History Center board of directors.

1993

1994
Lars A. Guerte, B.S., geology, a professional pilot and part-time competitor in the 2008 Air Race Classic, was promoted to executive vice president of the Fort Wayne Downtowners.

1998
Judith Nastally, A.S., architectural drafting, was promoted to executive vice president of Granit Ridge Builders Inc.

Alumni Notes

For Connie (M.S.Ed. ’78) and Dan (M.S.Ed. ’76) Dickey, philanthropy is not an obligation or duty; it is a joy to give back to the university of which they are both alumni. And on October 14 at the 10th annual Mastodon Bowl, the Connie and Dan Dickey Alumni Fountain was officially dedicated as a part of the new Alumni Plaza at IPFW.

The “flat” fountain, featuring a jumping jet of water, has joined the bronze mastodon statue outside Walb Memorial Coliseum, is a $20 million investment by Focus Hospitality Services and represents a first of its kind partnership. For the first time, the Holiday Inn brand will also serve as a classroom—in this instance, through a close relationship with IPFW.

“This is a new breed of hotel,” says Jerald Good, president and CEO of Focus Hospitality Services. “We’ve turned the hotel into a giant classroom, with actual classroom space, where we can showcase and teach the Focus Services and IPFW traditions of hospitality excellence to students wishing to enter the hospitality industry.”

Alumni Awards

Five IPFW alumni awards were presented to very deserving alumni and friends of IPFW during halftime of the Homecoming basketball game November 22. From left to right are Michael Fritsch (B.A. ’79, A.S. ’80, B.S. ’82), who was awarded the Bob F. Jesse Medal for his years of service to the IPFW Alumni Association, which included two years as president of the IPFWAA board of directors; M. James Johnston, who received the IPFW Honorary Lifetime Alumni Board Member award for his years of service to the university, most notably his expertise as IPFW Athletics was making the switch to NCAA Division I athletics; Associate Professor of Interior Design Matthew Kubik, who accepted the IPFW Honorary Lifetime Alumni Board Member award for his leadership in designing a future IPFW alumni center; Michael Newell (A.S. ’86, B.S. ’87, MBA ’91), who was awarded the Alumni Citation Award for the significant role he played in the creation of the IPFW Center for Wireless Technology, an IPFW Center of Excellence; and Daniel Churward (A.S. ’86, B.S. ’88), who accepted the IPFW Distinguished Service Award for his dedication to his alma mater and for his continued support of the College of Engineering, Technology, and Computer Science. IPFW Alumni Association Board President Karen Ochild, who presented the awards with Chancellor Michael Warren, appears on the right.

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Where tradition meets innovation

Fort Wayne welcomes first full-service hotel in 25 years

November marked the grand opening of the Holiday Inn at IPFW where, in the words of General Manager Rob Evans, “the level of comfort is greater than what you have at home.”

The draw is in the details. Not only does the step-up concept begin with a fine dining restaurant and a full-service bar—the Mastodon Grill and the Faculty Club, respectively—it continues with fine amenities, such as a 32-inch flat screen TV and thick, pillow-top mattresses in each of the facility’s 151 rooms. Even the hotel’s branding reflects a bold, new direction for the international hospitality chain.

“This is the first Holiday Inn in Indiana to be the new hallmark Holiday Inn,” Evans shares. “The chain recently re-launched its brand with a fresher, newer look that includes a new logo, new lightings and focus on the first impression that guests get on arrival.”

John Merkin, senior vice president for Holiday Inn Brand management in North America, complements Evans sentiments: “With this hotel design, Holiday Inn has arrived at the perfect convergence of tradition and innovation—one that will define the Holiday Inn of the future, offering the value and authenticity business travelers and families expect from this beloved brand.”

This new gem on the IPFW campus, across from Memorial Coliseum, is a $20 million investment by Focus Hospitality Services and represents a first of its kind partnership. For the first time, the Holiday Inn brand will also serve as a classroom—in this instance, through a close relationship with IPFW.

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IPFW Chancellor Michael Warren is pleased with the partnership for a number of reasons. “This benefits our students, our alumni, our community partners, and the IPFW neighborhood,” he says.

“Our students gain a competitive advantage, having access to training in both the theory and practice of hospitality; our alumni have a wonderful place to expand their campus connections by staying at the hotel or dining at the Mastodon Grill or Faculty Club; our business and community leaders have a fantastic venue for continued partnerships with IPFW and the Coliseum; and the hotel is a great amenity for the surrounding neighborhoods.”

Alumni Fountain dedicated

The Connie and Dan Dickey Alumni Fountain

Alumni Highlights

- 151 rooms
- Fine dining restaurant (Mastodon Grill)
- Full-service bar (Faculty Club)
- City’s largest indoor hotel pool
- Conference boardroom
- Spacious ballroom

Hotel Highlights

- Fitness center
- Classroom space for IPFW’s hospitality majors
- Thinnest, pillow-top mattresses
- 32-inch flat screen TVs
- Complementary wireless Internet
- Free parking

4111 Paul Shaffer Drive   •   260-482-3800
Heniser's work, visual effects are no longer exclusive to the landscape of Hollywood blockbusters.

Today, this specialization is frequently packaged for the small screen through an increasing number of television programs, commercials, music videos, and video games, where the desired images are either impossible or impractical to shoot in the real world. Consider the E*TRADE talking baby.

There is an important distinction to be made in the vocabulary of effects. Special effects and visual effects differ. Special effects refer to on-set mechanical effects and in-camera optical effects, while visual effects refer to digital post-production work—Heniser's specialty.

With a double major in math and computer science, Heniser is poised for these technology challenges that require a high degree of skill.

He has since heightened his credentials by earning an M.F.A. in Computer Art with a focus on visual effects from the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD).

“The craft of the visual effects artist has always been a combination of technology and art,” he shares. “It was IPFW that gave me a firm background in the technology and the mathematics that makes the technology even possible.

“SCAD helped me develop a set of fundamental artistic skills that I use everyday. Plus, they taught me how to harness my strong technical background to create aesthetically pleasing imagery.”

Heniser’s first professional job was at Dallas-based DNA Productions, an animation studio whose projects include *The Ant Bully*—a film about a boy who continually torments an ant hill, until one day when a magic potion shrinks him to the size of the ants, and he develops the compassion to help them save their colony from extinction.

The movie features the voice talents of Nicolas Cage, Julia Roberts, Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, and Paul Giamatti, among others. For *The Ant Bully*, Heniser developed software plug-ins to mathematically define the visual appearance of objects.

In 2005, Heniser moved to Los Angeles to work for Sony Pictures Imageworks, a state-of-the-art digital production studio dedicated to visual effects production and character animation.

There, he was a shader writer on *Shrek's Up*, coding a set of software instructions using applications in calculus and linear algebra, for example, to develop the appearance of texture and color with each object. His contributions on the movie—a pilgrimage about a teenage penguin seeking champion surfer acclaim—led to his development of a hair shader, which was used on each character who had hair, whether it appeared wet or dry, and a separate eye shader.

He considers these accomplishments to be among his proudest, he says.

Doug Townsend, IPFW professor of mathematical sciences and one of Heniser’s mentors, is not surprised by his former student’s competence.

“This is a case of the student surpassing the teacher!” Townsend says. “I taught him linear algebra and calculus, and I may still be able to prove a few theorems better than Ryan, but when it comes to applications, he’s way ahead of me.

And make no mistake. Heniser is quite the expert when it comes to getting under just about anyone’s skin. After all, his master’s thesis is titled “Rendering Human Skin for Feature Films: Achieving a Heightened Sense of Realism by Approximating Skin Layer Dynamics.”

Heniser says IPFW Associate Professor of Visual Communication Robert Murray was instrumental toward helping his thesis come to fruition by recommending SCAD for advanced study.

“Many of us say you can’t teach talent to people who don’t have it inherently.” Murray says. “You can expose them to the arts, and they will get it or they won’t. They shy away from what you share or they embrace it. Ryan embraced it.”

*I Am Legend*, an epic where Will Smith stars as the apparent sole survivor of a bacterial pandemic apocalypse, may qualify as Heniser’s most lucrative embrace of the arts to date.

With a team of collaborators at Sony Imageworks, Heniser designed shaders that gave New York City an earthquake zone appearance—void of life for years. The buildings, bridges, streets, and sidewalks were given a dilapidated look with image processing algorithms and 2-D live action plates.

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—Ryan Heniser, B.S. ’01

To Beomjin Kim, IPFW associate professor of computer science, it’s Heniser’s determination that has positioned him for this degree of career greatness. Heniser worked with Kim on an IPFW Undergraduate Research Grant to explore the interactive control of motion paths in vector fields.

“Instead of asking for solutions, he’d ask for resources to find the answers on his own,” Kim recalls. “He didn’t stop with just using the WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) tools. He wanted the actual foundation in computer science.”

As of last year, Heniser’s career greatness has found new challenges through Lucasfilm Ltd.’s Industrial Light & Magic, where he accepted a research and development software engineer position.

Industrial Light & Magic is one of seven divisions at Lucasfilm Ltd., named for founder and film pioneer George Lucas.

“I took the position because I want to know more about cutting-edge research project tools for movie productions instead of simply applying the tools to create images used in movies,” he says. “If you read up on the history of this industry, you will quickly realize that this has been and continues to be groundbreaking and innovative.”

In its 34-year history, the multiple Academy-Award winning ILM—which was first organized to create the visual effects for Star Wars—has never stopped breaking ground in digital imagery, delivering memorable movie creations throughout the company’s body of work, which includes the Indiana Jones, Jurassic Park, Star Trek, and Harry Potter series.

At ILM, Heniser says he is working on the proprietary application, Zeno, the organization’s animation pipeline. His stake in additional projects, which he says he cannot discuss due to intellectual property laws, will begin reaching theatres in 2010 and beyond.

As a growing fan base awaits his future contributions, may the Force be with him.
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Alumni fountain dedicated

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The “flat” fountain, featuring jumping jets of water, has joined the bronze mastodon statue outside Walb Hall and the Connie and Dan Dickey Alumni Fountain to leave their mark.

In addition to the footprints around the mastodon statue, the Alumni Millennium Walk bricks, alumni now have the opportunity to purchase a bricks to place around the fountain to leave their own lasting legacy. Some of them are simply engrained with a name, degree, and date. Others pay tribute to faculty and staff members or to student clubs, organizations, and other groups or individuals.

The cobblestones can be purchased for $100 and include three lines of text, 17 spaces per line. For more information about the cobblestones or to donate an order form, please contact Alumni Relations at 260-481-6807 or alumni@ipfw.edu.

Alumni Awards

Five IPFW alumni awards were presented to deserving alumni and friends of IPFW during halftime of the Homecoming basketball game November 22. From left to right are Michael Ritchis (B.A. ’79, A.S. ’80, B.S. ’82), who was awarded the Bob F. Jesse Medal for his years of service to the IPFW Alumni Association, which included two years as president of the IPFWAA board of directors; M. James Johnson, who received the IPFW Honorary Lifetime Alumni Board Member award for his years of service to the university, most notably his expertise as IPFW Athletics was making the switch to NCAA Division I Athletics; Associate Professor of Interior Design Matthew Kubik, who accepted the IPFW Honorary Lifetime Alumni Board Member award for his leadership in designing a future IPFW alumni center; Michael Newell (A.S. ’86, B.S. ’87, MBA ’91), who was awarded the Alumni Citation Award for the significant role he played in the creation of the IPFW Center for Wireless Technology, an IPFW Center of Excellence; and Daniel Churcard (A.S. ’86, B.S. ’88), who accepted the IPFW Distinguished Service Award for his dedication to his alma mater and for his continued support of the College of Engineering, Technology, and Computer Science. IPFW Alumni Association Board President Karen Cleland, who presented the awards with Chancellor Michael Warrell, appears on the right.

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IPFW students may bring one guest for free. The experience includes a VIP tailgate, a tour of the arena, and special pre-game reception for the men’s basketball team. Vendors will be on-hand to sell Mastodon apparel, and the Alumni Relations table will sell membership information and merchandise.

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Memorial Coliseum

Alumni Day with the Mastodons Alumni Saturday, February 28, Women’s game at 1:30 p.m., Men’s game at 4 p.m., Memorial Coliseum
IPFW alumni are encouraged to cheer on the men’s and women’s basketball teams at Alumni Day with the Mastodons. The men and women will take on Summit League rivals, the Southern Utah Thunderbirds. Tickets are being discounted for all alumni and their guests, and one ticket gets you admitted to both games. You will also have the opportunity to shoot a free throw at halftime, with the chance to win an autographed T-shirt from Men’s Basketball Coach Dane File. For ticket information, contact IPFW Athletics Ticket Manager Zach Sweers at 260-481-6372 or by e-mail at sweersz@ipfw.edu. For event information, contact Alumni Relations at 260-481-6807.

13th Annual Statehouse Bus Trip Tuesday, February 17, 8 a.m.–5 p.m., Indianapolis
Join students, faculty, staff, and fellow alumni traveling to Indianapolis to lobby our state legislature for increased funding for IPFW. The experience includes transportation, a how-to-lobby lesson, self-guided tour of the statehouse, lunch with legislators from the IPFW staff, and fellow alumni and your entire basket should be wrapped for the ninth year, the Northeast Indiana Alumni Directors Consortium is seeking wrapped Easter baskets to be given to the children of SCAN clients (Stop Child Abuse and Neglect). This is a great activity for families, church groups, your office, scout troops, and more. Ten Fort Wayne-area colleges and universities join forces each Easter and set a goal to collect more than 800 baskets for these children. Baskets must be commercially packaged (nothing homemade), and your entire basket should be wrapped so that nothing falls out. Drop off the baskets at any area college or university until April 3. At IPFW, you can drop off your baskets at the Ketterle Hall or Walb Student Union information desks or call us at 260-481-6807, and a representative from Alumni Relations will pick up your baskets from your car as you drive up to the Walb Student Union semi-circle driveway.

Tapestry: A Day for Women Friday, April 24, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m., Memorial Coliseum
Fashion expert Clinton Kelly, from TLC’s What Not to Wear, will be the keynote speaker for 2009’s Tapestry: A Day for Women. This annual program provides a day of renewal and self-growth for women of all ages, through educational, motivational, and inspirational activities in an atmosphere of camaraderie. Proceeds raised from the event support the Tapestry Parkview Endowment Fund, which provides scholarships to select IPFW female students majoring in the health or science fields. For more information regarding the event, contact the Tapestry Information Line at 260-481-6854 or tapestry@ipfw.edu. Registration begins February 27.

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Memorial Coliseum
Celebrities ranging from Will Smith, Nicolas Cage, and Julia Roberts owe alumnus Ryan Heniser a debt of gratitude.

Heniser isn't an accountant, business manager, press agent, or talent scout for Tinseltown royalty. He's been more of a 21st century make-up artist, perfecting their larger-than-life appearances through visual artistry. He helps them look their best.

Heniser, B.S. '01, has enjoyed an up-and-coming career at visual effects and animation studios, having completed work on the movies I Am Legend, Surf's Up, and The Ant Bully. He recently accepted a research and development software engineer position at Industrial Light & Magic. ILM is one of seven divisions at Lucasfilm Ltd., named for founder and film pioneer George Lucas. At ILM, he is working on the proprietary application, Zeno, the organization's animation pipeline.