



# The Fairfield Ledger

Yesterday's weather

High: 17°

Low: 3°

Precipitation: None



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## Fairfield film making waves overseas

### Local motion picture shown at premiere fantasy film festivals

By Andy Hallman, Ledger news editor

A group of Fairfield residents have become internationally known movie stars after appearing in a motion picture recently shown at a film festival in Spain.

The film is "Last Tree Standing," directed by Agnes Baginska, a 2016 graduate of Maharishi University of Management's David Lynch Master of Arts in Film. The movie stars local residents Lou Bolster and Sage Jarmosco in major roles, and a few others with Fairfield connections such as Jada Foster and Steve Kennevan.

Bolster plays Tree-man, a half-tree, half-human creature who represents the last tree on earth in the year 2071. Kennevan's character captures Treeman in order to sell him. Jarmosco's character, Lexie, befriends Treeman and undertakes a daring mission to free him. The 30-minute film has been well received by critics, and was one of only 23 short films from more than 2,000 submitted to appear in the Official Fantastic Selection of the Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival in Spain. The Sitges festival is widely regarded as the No. 1 fantasy film festival in the world. Her film was one of only five in the competition directed by a woman.

**Hatching the idea** Baginska said she got the idea for the film while meditating. She saw in her mind an evocative image of the half-man, half-tree creature that would become Bolster's character.

"This singular image inspired the rest of the story," she said.

The film was shot mostly in Fairfield during 2015, with additional scenes of miniatures shot the following year in Sydney, Australia. In 2015, Bolster dressed as his character for Eco-Jam, showcasing the wardrobe designed by Jami Johnson and Gage Blanton.

The main location for filming was the train yard in Fairfield belonging to Dave Theobodo of Rail Merchants International.

"Thanks to (Dave), we were able to dress up and film on a rail car that dated back to the times of the Great Depression," Baginska said.

The movie was made on what Baginska describes as a "shoe-string budget," which she said is often the case with short films.

"It is always very expensive to produce a fantasy genre film, as you need to create the film's world from scratch — one that looks different to our own," she said. "Quite often, it is also necessary to include visual effects, which are very expensive to produce."

A portion of "Last

Tree Standing" is animated, which required creating hundreds upon hundreds of illustrations, making it even more expensive to produce than a typical social drama. Funding came from a Kickstarter campaign as well as investors from the United States, Baginska's current home of Australia and her native country of Poland. Investors included ZPM Film, Headhunter Films and Far From Everything Films.

### Meeting the actors

#### Lou Bolster

Bolster is no stranger to the stage nor to the silver screen. He has been involved in 40-plus theater productions in the Midwest and greater Boston area, and been in numerous short films and one feature-length film. When the David Lynch Master's in Film Program got underway in the fall 2014, Bolster knew many students would be making films for their graduate projects. He let students know he was interested in performing. He received three offers, and liked the role of Treeman the best.

Bolster describes his character Treeman as a part human, part tree "mutant."

"He has taken it upon himself to care for things natural... plants large and small, trees and moss, and living things (like) critters and insects," Bolster said. "He knows that man is responsible for the destruction of the planet. He feels he can help an ultimate regeneration by caring for these living things, as rare as they are."

Bolster had to wear extensive makeup for the role, requiring him to report to the set two hours early.

To make him appear half-tree, the production crew created a plaster cast of his head, face and one of his hands, which they could decorate with sticks and leaves. Gerilyn Pagua and Anila Cunningham glued the silicon head and hand pieces into place each day.

The most challenging part of the role was that Bolster's character can only grunt, which limited his dialog, to put it mildly.

"In our daily lives as we express ourselves, our emotions, and interpret those around us, we rely heavily on talking — on what words we use and how they are delivered," he said. "The human side of Treeman has a great range of emotion he wants to share. So, without words to use, those need to come through in body language, facial expression and eyes. And, they need to come through the (silicon) and the costume."

#### Sage Jarmosco

Jarmosco is an 11-year-old enrolled at Maharishi School, and was 8 at the time of filming. The youngster was wanted to be a performer for as long as she can remember, and her role as Lexie in this film is just one of many she's taken on. Earlier this month,



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZPM FILM

Lou Bolster portrays Tree Man, the half-man, half-tree mutant at the center of "Last Tree Standing."



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEL SAUERBECK

Makeup artist Gerilyn Pagua, left, and costume designers Gage Blanton, back, and Jami Johnson, right, prepare Lou Bolster's costume. Bolster said he had to arrive on the set two hours early to give the crew enough time to put him in character.

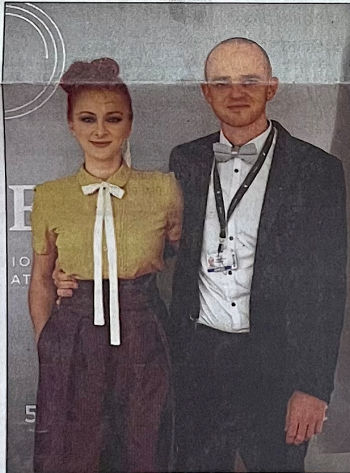


PHOTO COURTESY OF ZPM FILM

Director Agnes Baginska and cinematographer Zachary Peel-McGregor at the Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival in October.

she performed on stage as one of the leading actors in Fairfield Area Community Theater's production of "A Christmas Story: The Musical." Even before performing in "Last Tree Standing," Sage had appeared in two short student films by M.U.M. master's in film students, one by Meghan Kurth and another by Melissa Chaconas. She has also had leading roles in summer theater camps at the Fairfield Arts & Convention Center.

In the film, Jarmosco's character Lexie initially adopts the attitude toward Treeman shared by the other humans, one of fear, curiosity and the feeling he is an imposter. But before long, Lexie befriends him and tries to help him escape, to avoid the fate of being chopped up by Gage (played by M.U.M. alumna Jada Foster) and Killian (played by Steve Kennevan).

Jarmosco said the most challenging part

was having to yell and fight with Gage, since she is actually good friends with Foster in real life. Another challenge was remaining on set until 1 a.m., since filming occurred after dark.

Baginska said she was skeptical of finding a child Jarmosco's age who could fill such an important role. And yet, that's exactly what she found.

During her audition, Baginska asked Jarmosco to improvise lines to a scene, to test her acting mettle. She passed with flying colors.

"I knew right away that she's our Lexie," Baginska said. "She was hard working, always on time and always knew her lines. Both of her parents were very supportive and accommodating."

Jarmosco is the daughter of Juliet and Darryl Jarmosco.

Steve Kennevan



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZPM FILM

Sage Jarmosco portrays the main character Lexie, who befriends Tree Man and hopes to set him free.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEL SAUERBECK

Actors Steve Kennevan and Jada Foster pose for a picture between takes.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZPM FILM

Most of the film was shot at the site of the former Rock Island Railroad freight yard in Fairfield. The scenery was enhanced with special effects in post production.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIET JARMOSCO

Jada Foster, left, enjoys a light-hearted moment on set with co-star Sage Jarmosco.

in Iowa City for more than 20 years. About five years ago, he appeared in a film shot in Fairfield called "The Vindication of Ronald Clay," directed by M.U.M. professor Cullen Thomas. From there, he developed more connections with the university and with filmmakers in the area, specifically the associate program director of the David Lynch Master's in Film Program, Eden West. His Fairfield films have included "Heartland," "Newsraven," "Lilith's Awakening," "8 1/2 Circles" and now, "Last Tree Standing."

Kennevan said his character Killian is a survivor, making his home within abandoned railroad cars, living by his wits, with a ruthlessness born of necessity. He has taken into his home a young woman, Gage, merely for companionship and meal preparation, and a young girl, Lexie, whom he simply tolerates.

"He is essentially the

antagonist of the film," Kennevan said. "His actions are brutal and self-serving."

### Film festivals

Before it was shown at Sitges, the film played at the Cannes Short Film Corner. In November, the film had its official French premiere at Les Utopiales de Nantes, an international science fiction festival considered one of the best in Europe.

More recently, the film was awarded Best Music Score in the Short Film Category during the 2017 Australian Screen Music Awards, and a Silver Award in the Short Film Category at the 2017 Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS) State & Territory Awards for Cinematography.

Despite being shot principally in Iowa, the film has yet to make its American premiere, though Baginska said she plans to submit it to Iowa-based film festivals in the near future.