Creating Futures

NORMANDALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SPRING 2008

‘Legacy for Learning’

A shared passion for film and education brings historic film collection to Normandale

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A private film archive—the 3rd largest and most versatile in the United States—has been made available exclusively to Normandale for preservation and development as an educational resource.

The collection contains more than 6,000 prints that date back to the turn of the 20th century: newsreels from both World Wars, ‘soundies,’ shorts, sports, cartoons, Hollywood features, dance and music. Some of them are rare original; many of them have never been seen publicly.

But, at 7 p.m., Sunday, May 4, 2008, Twin Cities Public Television (Channel 17) will air “Big Band Treasures,” a program produced by Normandale in collaboration with TPT, which will showcase a portion of the rare and exceptional footage that tells some of the story of the early years of jazz on film.

The collection is the product of film archivist and historian Bob DeFlores who, at the age of 12, bought his first film clip at a camera shop in Hollywood, California, and started what became a lifetime of pursuing his passion.

Four years ago, when DeFlores formed a partnership with Normandale, his goal was to preserve the collection by converting it to digital media and cataloging it onto a database so that it could be developed for use in college and university classrooms around the country and beyond.

“This is a national treasure and an educational treasure,” said Dr. Carol Heen, director of what is now known as the DeFlores Film Project. “Through the partnership forged with Bob DeFlores, Normandale has a wonderful opportunity to weave the film into the curriculum to add extra value to the teaching that takes place here.”

Heen emphasizes that the collection will not be used to create curriculum, but to produce innovative educational tools that are new to the classroom and will supplement existing textbooks and other resource materials.

Combining Two Passions

Because education is also one of DeFlores’ passions, and working with students is really what he enjoys the most about his work, he combined his two passions and, for the past 30 years, has traveled throughout the country giving film presentations at libraries, colleges, universities and other organizations. “I love doing things like this for students,” he said. “You can see their eyes light up when they see real history enacted for them up on the screen.

“I also wanted to preserve my collection, and I loved the idea of making DVDs for the classroom—to have original film clips of Louis Armstrong as part of the music curriculum or clips from the Suffragette movement as part
of the early American history curriculum. This could make history come alive for them and nothing could make me happier.”

DeFlores came to Minnesota in 1969 to work as a commercial artist for an architectural firm. In 1977, he decided to develop his “passion hobby” full-time. Eight years ago, he was introduced to Normandale by a friend and began giving film presentations at the college—as fundraisers for student scholarships, or topic-based specials (such as one on jazz musicians during Black History Month). He received a warm welcome every time, and a strong relationship with the college began.

He wanted to do more than just one-shot presentations; he wanted to put his collection into the classroom.

With that in mind, DeFlores approached former Normandale president Dr. Thomas Horak and suggested that they go into an equal business partnership. DeFlores would bring his collection and film knowledge to the table; Normandale would bring its administrative services and technical expertise.

“Horak listened and understood DeFlores’ vision, so he took the idea to the college’s foundation and got them on board,” said Heen. “The initial monetary contribution to the project came, privately, from one of the board members, and grants from the college and contributions from individuals and other organizations have followed.”

Heen explained that DeFlores wants his collection to have a legacy. He doesn’t want it to be divided and scattered. “It is a life-long and deeply personal work,” she said, “and it is very important to him that it has enhanced meaning; that it will help students going forward. He could have offered it to one of the top film schools around the country or to the Library of Congress, but he didn’t want to just add to an already large collection.”

All that Jazz

Jazz is a significant portion of the DeFlores collection, and Jazz History will be the first course in which this new resource will be used. To be taught by music instructor Aaron Moe either in the summer or fall of 2008, the course materials will include “Big Band Treasures,” a DVD of the pilot program produced with TPT.

“This is an overview or survey course that I hope will give students an appreciation of musicians as artists and a more refined understanding of jazz as one of the few genuine American art forms,” said Moe. “The DVD will include clips of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Stan Kenton, Helen O’Connell and Helen Humes. The accompanying study guide will help lead us into discussions about basic instrumentation and how ensembles work together, as well deeper discussions about the big historical issues of the time, such as race, gender, performance conditions and life on the road.

“With one film clip (of Duke Ellington and his orchestra, for example) we can see many layers of social commentary, which can be used to explain what was happening in the whole country in 1930. We can also talk about the conductor as a composer, arranger and entertainer,” said Moe. “This is new material not used in the classroom before. It will bring these performers to life and add value to a course that I previously taught without it.”

While music is a major part of the DeFlores collection, the extraordinary amount and variety of footage—some nearly 100 years old—covers practically any subject that could be used in 20th Century American History, Minority Studies, Women’s Studies, Sports and many more.

“Throw a dart in the course catalog and there will be some way we can use this collection,” said Heen. “There are no restrictions or particular order in which the materials will be developed. Choices will be made based on Normandale’s strengths, the educational value and application of the materials to the classroom and, of course, the availability of funding.”

Those choices are being made by a coordinating committee that has been meeting monthly for about four years. Comprised of faculty, staff, members of the Normandale community, a TPT representative and DeFlores, the committee reviews every aspect of the project, considers new ideas and sources of funding and keeps the timetable on track.

However, before any of the film can be used for instructional purposes, there are four steps that must be taken:

- **Acquisition and cataloging**: indexing and cross referencing of the materials needed for each program
- **Digitizing**: commercial conversion of the original and highly vulnerable film into a new medium—the digital tape format that will preserve it for the future

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**TPT to Air ‘Big Band Treasures’ May 4**

The first program, produced by Normandale and Twin Cities Public Television (TPT Channel 17) using rare film footage from the DeFlores collection, will be aired on TPT at 7 p.m., Sunday, May 4, 2008. “Big Band Treasures” tells some of the story of the early years of jazz with clips of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Stan Kenton, Helen O’Connell and Helen Humes. A study guide, developed to accompany the DVD of the program, will be used for the first time in the Jazz History course to be taught at Normandale either in the summer or fall 2008.