

UP CLOSE

AND PERSONAL in
PEACHTREE CITY
TYRONE • SENOIA
& SURROUNDINGS Vol. 1 Issue 1



AT RIVER WOOD
STUDIOS IT'S ALL
ABOUT FAMILY

RIVER WOOD
STUDIOS

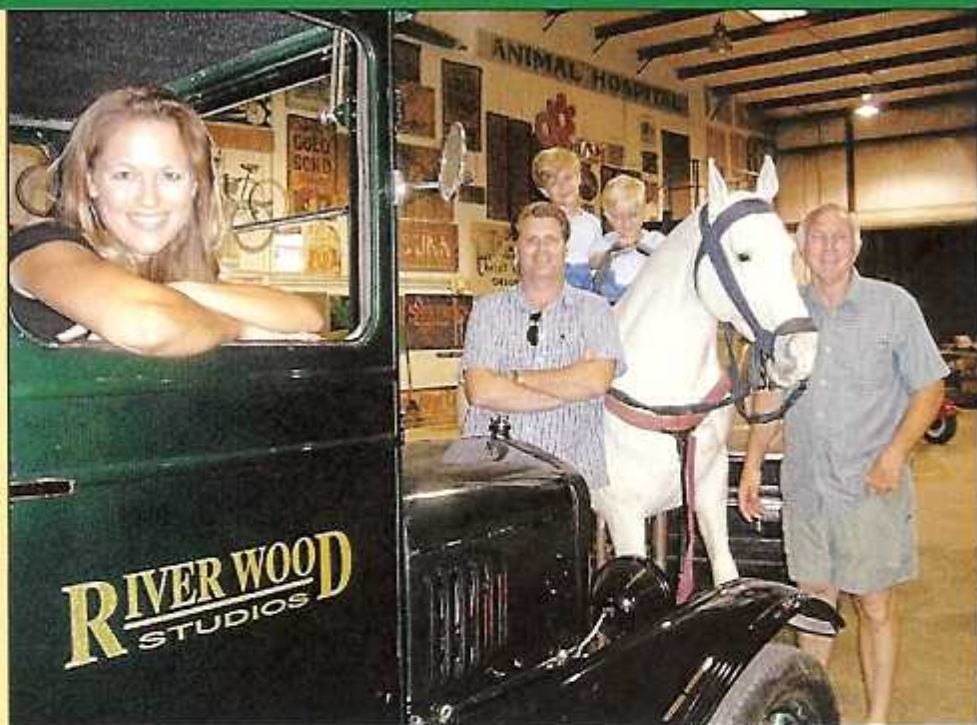


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Riverwood Studios Focuses On Family Entertainment

A story about how a movie studio ended up in Senoia seemed interesting for the premier issue of Up Close & Personal. Prior to our interview with Scott Tigchelaar, we had not planned his story for our cover. As Scott spoke in our meeting, it became apparent that he offers more than a connection to Hollywood. The history of Riverwood Studios is fascinating; its future is still unfolding. Scott's stated intention is to make Riverwood about family and community—what a perfect cover story for a magazine that is also about family and community! We are thankful to share Scott's story here in his own words:

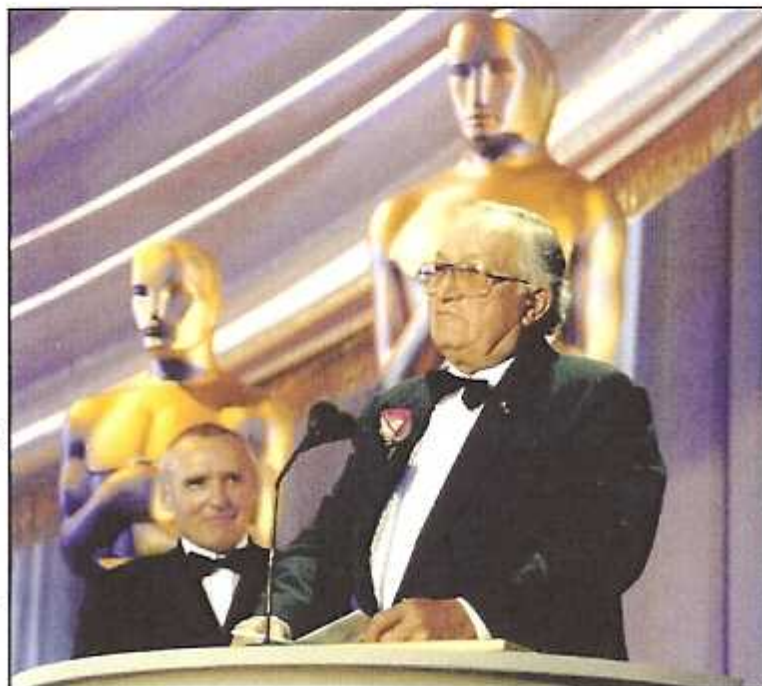


Scott Tigchelaar is the President of Riverwood Studios in Senoia and is depicted here with his uncle, Paul Lombardi, CEO of Riverwood Studios; his wife Adrienne and sons Christopher (8) and Ben (6).

“Although my family began working in the film industry well before I was born, I didn't really get personally involved until after high school. During summer breaks from college, I would try to visit my uncle, Paul Lombardi, who was often on location coordinating the special effects for various film and television productions.

It was always interesting on a movie set. Each show was different, and it often involved traveling to unusual places. One moment you could be watching Custer's last stand in Billings, Montana with Cavalry and Indians and the next, you could be in Cleveland blowing up a refinery on the Cuyahoga river, or perhaps on the set of an alien spaceship on a soundstage in Los Angeles. The average show only lasted six months, so you rarely had an opportunity to get bored.

I'm the third generation in this business. My great uncle Joe Lombardi (Paul's father) began working at RKO in 1947, and by 1953 was running the Special Effects Department at Desilu Studios. He was in charge of the special effects for all of Lucy and Desi's productions, including: "I Love Lucy," "The Andy Griffith Show," "Star Trek," "Mission Impossible," "Mannix," and "The Untouchables." While Joe



"In 1997, Joe Lombardi was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for pioneering work in Special Effects."

worked, Paul was running around as a kid on the set. . . They let you do that back then. He even appeared in an episode or two of "Lassie."

By the late 1960's, the Hollywood 'studio system' had broken up and everyone who used to work as an employee of a single studio became an independent contractor to all of them. Joe started the first independent special effects company in Hollywood (then called Special Effects Unlimited). He was responsible for coordinating effects for more TV series, and films like "Godfather I & II," "Uncommon Valor," "Hamburger Hill," and "Apocalypse Now."

In 1997, Joe won a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, for 50 years of pioneering special effects in the industry. He passed away later that same year while working on the film, "When Trumpets Fade" in Budapest.

Today, Paul continues Joe's legacy at the helm of the largest special effects company in Hollywood (now Full Scale Effects). Full Scale is responsible for special effects in film, television, commercials and music videos. Their work includes TV series such as "CSI Miami," "24," "My Name Is Earl," "X Files," and "Nash Bridges," as well as films like "Courage Under Fire," "Clear and Present Danger," "Conair," "The Last Samurai," and this summer's Disney release, "Underdog."

The physical effects side of the industry includes smoke, wind, fire, rain, snow, pyrotechnics, atmosphere, mechanical, custom fabrication, animatronics, electronics, hydraulics, and special rigging, such as that used for making actors appear to 'fly.' The problem solving aspects of the job are most interesting to me, especially when a prototype of some sort has to be designed and built to accomplish what's never been done before.

People often ask how Paul and Joe went from special effects in Hollywood to building a motion picture studio in Senoia, Georgia. In 1989, when Riverwood Studios was built, Georgia was ranked third in the nation for production behind New York and Los Angeles. At the time, producers were looking for a cheaper location in which to film. . . Georgia had good weather, diverse looks, and was easily accessible. It was that simple.

Paul and Joe both had a desire to get back to the 'good old days' that they had experienced at Desilu Studios, where employees were considered to be part of the company 'family,' and the productions were more wholesome and family friendly than most of those we see today. They decided to build their own studio, and considered Georgia the best option, since large tracts of land were neither affordable nor available in Los Angeles.

In 1986, when Riverwood was still in the concept phase, Paul met a guy in the jungles of the Philippines, while working on the film, "Hamburger Hill," who coincidentally had land available for sale outside of Senoia, Georgia.

After searching the entire Atlanta area, the property in Senoia proved to be the best option for many reasons. In



"Facts of Life" - 1960 - Joe, Bob, Lucy
Joe Lombardi makes rain for an episode of "Facts of Life" with Bob Hope and Lucy.



"I Love Lucy" - 1963 - Joe, Lucy

addition to being a quaint, picturesque town, Senoia was close enough to the airport for easy accessibility, yet far enough away to be out of the flight pattern. Peachtree City was conveniently located between Senoia and the airport and had the hotels, condos, and restaurants for film crew support. The intersection of Hwy #16 and Hwy #85 also offered easy access to numerous additional small towns and rural locations for filming. Finally, there was the 120 acre tract of

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land available that offered a quiet surrounding, privacy, and numerous on-site shooting locations.

When Riverwood was initially built, plans to produce in-house were put on hold, as the studio was in high demand from other production companies, so it was rented out to Universal and other studios for projects such as "Fried Green Tomatoes," "The War," "Andersonville," "Freejack," and others. Hollywood has always been a 'feast or famine' business, so you need to 'make your hay while the sun shines'... if someone wants to rent space, you rent it.

However, by the mid-nineties, the film industry started to taper off both in Georgia and across the US as a cheap Canadian dollar and Canadian tax incentives for production companies lured the projects to Canada. The term 'runaway production' was sorely introduced to Hollywood, and the very same reason productions initially came to Georgia (because it was cheaper) became the reason productions left and went to Canada.

For us, Riverwood's availability was an opportunity to get back to our original plan to produce family entertainment, so in 1997, we started production on a children's television show for Hallmark called "Zoobilee Zoo."

Later that year, Joe died while working in Europe. Filming had taken place during winter conditions, and Joe caught a cold, which then escalated into a sinus infection. Medical care in Budapest is not exactly world class, and the infection was merely treated with aspirin. Had he been in the US, a simple antibiotic might have taken care of the problem... by the time he was flown to London, it was too late, a severe hemorrhage killed him.

Joe was one of the toughest people I'd ever met, a human Clydesdale horse... he'd probably be alive today if he'd been working in the US and had received proper medical attention.

We miss him. He was a real character, one of Hollywood's 'old timers', with more stories than there was ever time for him to tell. He's definitely remembered by anyone who ever worked with him. Often when filming on location, he'd set up one of the special effects semi-trailers (48' mobile effects shops) as his ad-hoc kitchen. He'd be in



*Scott Tigchelaar and his great uncle,
Joe Lombardi*

there making bombs on one side of the trailer, and cooking up pasta on the other... that was the Italian in him. During the filming of "Clear and Present Danger" in Mexico City, the special effects 'kitchen' was officially dubbed "Joe's Pasta Wagon".

Most days, Joe would whip up a batch of sauce, pasta, Italian sausage and whatever else he could get his hands on... and he'd always make enough for 50 people; all the while building bombs and wiring up explosives for the film. Word got around fairly quickly, and before long, even Harrison Ford was showing up for a regular seating.

In 1997, Joe was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for his pioneering work in special effects.

A lot happened in '97. At the time of Joe's death, I had just gotten married, Georgia's film industry was migrating to Canada, and Full Scale Effects was busier than ever. Having to deal with settling Joe's estate, Paul stopped production on "Zoobilee Zoo," and my wife and I moved to Toronto. Paul was busy running 6 shows in LA, so Riverwood went back to being rented by outside productions... productions which were smaller, fewer, and farther between.



Family Fishing Trip

*From left to right: Paul, my father Ed Tigchelaar, myself,
and my grandfather Jack Goodbrand*

By 2000, when we thought the dust had finally settled, Paul's wife Sheila was suddenly diagnosed with a brain tumor. She died in 2001 at only 52 years of age. With things still busy in LA, and little or no production in Georgia, Paul made the decision to shut the studio down until he could 're-group.'

In 2003, he called me in Toronto to talk about the future of Riverwood. By this time, location decisions for films were entirely driven by where producers could find the best tax incentives. Countries like Australia, New Zealand, and many of those in Europe had all followed Canada's lead in offering attractive financial benefits to anyone willing to film there. They all recognized that when a movie spent tens or hundreds of millions of dollars, the net economic benefit to them, in spite of the incentive, was significant.



Joe Lombardi's House of Pasta

In the US, only 3 or 4 states had gotten competitive and passed their own incentives in an effort to claw back a piece of this uniquely American industry which was being exported offshore... and Georgia wasn't among them.

Paul and I agreed that if Georgia wouldn't get in the game and make the state competitive, the only choice for Riverwood would be to sell it as industrial space. I flew down and met with Senator Mitch Seabaugh to explain the situation. He recognized the opportunity to create jobs, and for Georgia to take advantage of an economic shot in the arm, and started working on tax incentives to bring the film industry back.

Unfortunately, even though Senator Seabaugh structured the incentive so that Georgia would net a profit, it took two years to pass. By the time an incentive was finally passed in 2005, this state had lost a critical opportunity to gain a competitive advantage, in spite of Seabaugh's efforts to move quickly. By the time Georgia's incentive actually took effect, 34 other states had passed more attractive incentives.

Undeterred, Seabaugh worked with the 2007 Legislature to amend Georgia's incentive, making it more competitive with surrounding states who'd been reaping substantial benefits from the return of runaway production. The amendment passed, and Hollywood took notice, but unfortunately it was vetoed by the Governor post session.

Regardless, eighteen years after it was built, Riverwood is getting back to the original plan to produce its own films... films that promote family values. I serve on the Board of the Christian Film & Television Commission which produces the film ratings magazine *Movieguide*, and an endless amount of data in their *Annual Report to Hollywood* that clearly illustrates how family friendly films consistently make more money over time than restricted films. In terms of simple dollars and cents, an R rating is a bad financial decision... it only serves to restrict the number of a film's possible viewers.

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“There is endless data supporting the fact that family rated movies do better financially than R rated films.”

A typical project that Riverwood might produce would be in the \$3-\$5 million range. It would likely be scripted to take advantage of the assets and locations at our immediate disposal, and Riverwood and Full Scale Effects would invest the majority of their services ‘in-kind’, in order to maximize the production value that ends up on the screen, while minimizing an investor’s risk.

Though we’re intent on films rated for families, that doesn’t necessarily mean “Pollyanna” or “Little House on the Prairie.” The studio films produced prior to 1965 were rated G, yet most dealt with mature themes, such as war, action/adventure, murder mystery, etc. They just dealt with those themes in a non-explicit manner. My favorite film of all time is “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” and it’s rated PG.

The most important thing is starting with a good story. It sounds simple, but it’s amazing how many people overlook this critical component. Once you’ve got the right script, the actual making of the film is the easiest part... the

hardest part is raising the money. Somewhere in between is distributing the film, which fortunately has gotten a lot easier in the last ten years with the rise of the independent film market.


“The goal in making a movie is not to push a political agenda or a world view. The movie business is here to entertain. People in the industry have forgotten that we are here to entertain.”

Making a film is a lot like building a house. The executive producer is the person putting up the money, the line producer is the general contractor, the director and production designer are the architects, and all of the skilled trades, cameraman, lighting technician, make-up artist, and special effects technicians are the sub-contractors. Paul always refers to himself as just a ‘plumber’ on a film.

The business model has the same similarities. You’ve got to know the market, focus on quality, understand what product will sell and what won’t, and at the end of the day make sure you ‘build’ it for something less than what you can sell it for.

With the incentives available, prudent investment in film is actually feasible, and less risky than most people might think. The federal government now allows a taxable investor to write-off 100% of it’s investment in a US made film in one year, providing a great tax deferral vehicle. Many states offer further incentives through either a tax

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Inside Riverwood Studios one might recognize the bicycle built for four from "Mary Poppins", or the horse from "The Last Samurai." Other props include signs from "Andersonville" and "Fried Green Tomatoes."

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rebate or tax credit, ranging anywhere from 10% to 30% of the production budget spent in that particular state. Add to this the in-kind investment from a studio and special effects company like Riverwood and Full Scale, and an investor can produce a \$5 million product for \$1-\$2 million of actual exposure... that's a pretty low threshold to profitability.

To refer back to my construction analogy, it's like general contracting your own house, building on a lot that didn't cost you anything, and getting all of your 'plumbing' and 'electrical' at no charge. When you go to sell that house, your threshold to profitability is much lower than all of the other builders out there who had to pay market value for everything you didn't.

In my opinion, the single greatest risk to investing in film projects is the unusually high percentage of swindlers throughout the industry, people who will take your money and sell you a bill of goods. However, if you can sift through the carpetbaggers, there's a real opportunity to have some fun, be a part of creating something special, and even make a few bucks along the way.

So many jobs in this life involve what Paul refers to as 'middle'... you're always doing the same thing day in and day out. You never really start something new, and you're never really finished. A film project is different...

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Historic Senoia Project

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it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it cycles very quickly. It's like taking the entire life of a company, from concept to execution to IPO, and condensing it all down into six months, and then doing it again with an entirely new company. For the true entrepreneur, the pace is very addictive, and you can never go back to a plain old 'desk job'.

The film industry has certainly gone through some changes in the 60 years our family has been involved. Like any business, it has its ups and downs, its feasts and famines. At the end of the day, you're thankful to have enjoyed your work, paid your mortgage, and you hope to have helped create something that will entertain people for generations to come.



L-R Back Row: Sheila Lombardi, Paul Lombardi and Janet Goodbrand (Sheila's sister)
Front row: Scott Tigchelaar, Sue Tigchelaar and Sheila Tigchelaar in center held by Paul

The Historic Senoia Project

Given the similarities between the film business and construction, it's no surprise to us that we've recently embarked on a large scale re-development of the historic district of the City of Senoia.

Senoia is a special place for many reasons. It's one of the few cities in Georgia that doesn't have a state highway running through its downtown. It's also relatively close to Atlanta, yet it has been uniquely preserved, saved from modern development by key landholders who've simply refused to sell their commercial property to outsiders for the generations that they've owned it.

Through Riverwood Studios, we've enjoyed being part of the Senoia community for almost 20 years. Since 1989, sixteen films have used Senoia as a location. A new film, "Meet the Browns," begins filming in town as this publication goes to print.

When the opportunity presented itself to purchase most of the developable land in the historic district, and 'fill it in' with new retail, office, and residential, all designed to look as though it were built 100 years ago, we jumped on it.

We sat down with many of the commercial landowners and patriarchs in town and told them what we wanted to do. They'd all experienced the economic benefit of the film industry over the years, and appreciated the fact that Senoia's quaint historic look and charm were what kept the industry coming back time after time. They agreed to sell certain key parcels of land and *The Historic Senoia Project* was born.

We've only just begun, and already this has been one of the most enjoyable things we've ever worked on. Senoia's not just an old fashioned place, it's an old fashioned experience. The people are honorable and family minded... most of our purchases have been made on a hand shake. Our quest to return to the good old days of filmmaking has led us to a modern day Mayberry... and we couldn't be more pleased.



Scott Tigchelaar and Paul Lombardi review plans for the Historic Senoia Project

Residents and local government have been overwhelmingly supportive. Unbeknownst to us, Senoia had been on a parallel path for the past few years, holding town hall meetings and defining the future they wanted for the town that's a near perfect match to our intent. This project has become a community effort that reminds me of an Amish barn raising... everyone is getting involved, and enthusiastic about the end result.

I think we've all seen that there's no shortage of 'vanilla' out there when it comes to new development. It's gotten to the point where you can't tell one subdivision from the next, and the strip malls and restaurants all look the same. It's hard to define a sense of community when there's nothing to set these places apart from everywhere else.

We love Senoia for its distinction, and our goal is to add to it carefully and consistently. It has stood the test of time for a reason. Construction is underway, and we've already got boutique shops, non-chain restaurants, professionals and even future residents lining up to make Senoia their new home. There's room for more, but we're being selective, seeking out certain businesses that fit the context of the project and inviting them to come and take a look.

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The main residential component of the Project will be 120 brownstones, urban-live-work town homes, factory lofts, and old fashioned single family homes... all will look like they were built in the early 1900's and all will be appropriately located right in the middle of Senoia's historic district, within walking distance of the Main St. shops and restaurants. Historical Concepts of Peachtree City designed the concept plan, and Riverwood added its expertise to ensure that it helps make the town even more conducive to future film projects.

By November, Maguire's Irish Pub will be providing a "Cheers" type atmosphere, live music, and traditional pub fare for family and friends in the lower level of the new building under construction at the corner of Seavy and Main Streets, and the Redneck Gourmet is expanding its business from Newnan with its neo-urban, casual menu on the main floor of the same building. FM 92.5 'The Bear' will soon be broadcasting from an old fashioned '50's style

radio booth on Main St., and upper floors will offer some of the professional amenities that Senoia has been missing for a number of years now, including a law practice, ReMAX franchise, and medical care from Dr. Bill Greening's Senoia Family Care practice, a chiropractor, massage therapist, podiatrist, and other specialists.

Further on down the street you'll soon find a 'white table cloth' bistro that will offer live jazz and a chef and menu that rivals the best of Midtown or the Virginia Highlands. Just beyond that, we'll be building a re-creation of the Café from "Fried Green Tomatoes," serving up southern fare in a unique setting, right across the railroad tracks from the "Fried Green Tomatoes" house used in the film. Around town, space will also soon be available for more boutique and old fashioned retailers such as a pharmacy/soda fountain; dry goods, or a chocolate/fudge confectioner and candy store.

One of our most popular proposed projects is a single screen theatre on Main St., designed to serve as a multi-use event generator for premiers, private / corporate events, film festivals, and matinees.

The theater (for which construction is tentatively slated to begin late in 2008) hopes to serve as an event generator for the city with ideas in the works such as a "Fried Green Tomatoes" festival, dinner and a classic movie, corporate meetings, private parties, premieres, and Summer weekday matinees managed by licensed, bonded daycare to run a

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If anyone's interested in hearing more, you can usually find Paul or me at the Senoia Coffee Company first thing in the morning. It's a daily ritual for many in town, and it's part of that charm and sense of community that we enjoy so much. Paul's already bought a little 100 year old cottage that he's fixed up for when he's here in town, and my wife and I are at the top of the list for a brownstone when residential construction starts later this year.

We've dubbed the project "25 miles and 100 years from Atlanta". If that sounds appealing... we'll look forward to seeing you around town."

Movies filmed in Senoia include:

"Fried Green Tomatoes," "Driving Miss Daisy," "Sweet Home Alabama," "The Fighting Temptations," "Broken Bridges," "Pet Sematary II," "Mama Flora's Family," "The War," "Gordy," "Guyana Tragedy," "White Lies," "I'll Fly Away," "Carolina Skeletons," "Andersonville," "A Christmas Memory," "Consenting Adults," "Dirty Laundry," "Freejack," "Zoobilee Zoo," and "Meet the Browns."



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Below: The Senoia Coffee Company where Scott and Paul meet every morning.

Left: Film Crew for "Meet the Browns."

