Lee “Bo” Henry, Resident Theatre Technology Expert for “James and the Giant Peach”

One Credit Hour Short of MFA, Lee “Bo” Henry Returns to MSU
One credit hour short of his MFA, one degree of separation from an MSU College of Arts and Letters master of fine arts in production design, Lee “Bo” Henry decided to write the MSU Department of Theatre and ask if there was a way he could finish his degree. Coincidentally, Kirk Domer, Department of Theatre chair, had just read an email confirming that the 2012-13 Theatre season was finalized, and that the play based on Roald Dahl’s “James and the Giant Peach” was on the schedule.

As Kirk read Bo’s resume, he was startled to see that Henry was the set construction supervisor for Tim Burton’s film version of “James and the Giant Peach.” Marveling at the coincidence, Kirk began to formulate a plan for Bo to finish his degree, and for the Department of Theatre’s students, faculty and theatre patrons to benefit from the theatrical engineer’s extensive and specific “Giant Peach” experience.

What Kirk read was that, since leaving MSU in the mid-1970s, Henry had spent 40 years constructing, designing and managing the set and lighting for the entertainment industry. Domer lost no time in contacting Henry and arranging for him to come back to MSU as guest designer and technologist for the MSU Department of Theatre’s production of “James and the Giant Peach,” as well as guest expert for a special screening in the Pasant Theatre to showcase Henry’s work on the Tim Burton film of the same name.

“During his residency, Bo also conducted student workshops as part of earning his final graduate credit,” says Domer. “In the end, he contributed more than enough to satisfy the MFA requirements, and he graduated in December 2012.”

“Recently, I returned to educational theatre after many years in the entertainment industry, and I’m thrilled to be back in live theatre.”

BEGAN AT MSU IN THE ’70s

Lee “Bo” Henry identified his passion early on and received his theatrical set and lighting design education from Washington State University and Michigan State University. He said that he chose Michigan State straight out of high school because, “MSU was one of the schools that approached me, and I was interested in going somewhere different after growing up in the Northwest.”

As for how MSU helped prepare him for his future career, Henry says, “The fact that we shared the stage with everyone in the world, or at least everyone on the campus in the ’70s, meant we were required to mount the productions in two days. I learned the meaning of being organized and efficient.”

ROCK STARS TO THE FORTUNE 100

Bo worked 20 years in the San Francisco Bay area on a wide variety of projects and productions. He managed one of the largest scenic shops in the country, FM Productions, overseeing painting and sculpting for a diverse group of clients, such as The Rolling Stones, IBM, Coca-Cola, The Who, Toyota, David Bowie and Budweiser. During those years Henry’s duties included developing set designs as well as handling corporate accounts for clients ranging from Universal Studios to Siegfried and Roy.

Bo started his own business designing and building sets for television commercials, and also began working on stop-motion animation. He designed and built sets for a variety of national spots, including more than 20 Pillsbury Doughboy commercials. His stop-motion animation experience lead to supervising the construction of sets for “Nightmare Before Christmas,” “James and the Giant Peach,” and “Coraline” (a film that was produced by another College of Arts & Letters alum, Bill Mechanic).

Henry’s work in commercial construction includes managing major themed building projects for more than 10 years in locations ranging from Florida to Nevada. Again, the range of clients was diverse and intriguing, including Disney’s California Adventure and the conversion of Swiss Family Robinson’s Tree House to Tarzan’s Tree House in Disneyland.