

LIVING THE Celluloid Dream

Steven Elbert retires early to fulfill a lifelong goal.

Steven Elbert started wearing his seatbelt in the '70s, far before it became second nature for most of the driving world. During high school, he worked in the morgue of a local hospital. He saw who survived car crashes and who did not. And, because he grew up in a small town, he often knew the person being wheeled into the morgue with no evidence of bruising on the right or left shoulder.

You might think Elbert simply an impressionable young man. Or, you might allow that a teenager who learns from other's mistakes is likely to become an adult who sets goals and is successful in achieving them. From my brief meeting with Elbert at Teresa's Mexican Restaurant, I'd say he's still the same kind of smart.

When he sees me he stands up from the table and steps forward with a warm handshake. He's wearing a purple tie and white button-down under a casual quarter-zip sweater. A well-trimmed goatee frames an easy smile below frameless glasses and curly hair.

I can tell a lot about an interviewee by how they handle this first moment. Are they nervous? Do they feel worthy of media coverage? Have they frantically squeezed this interview in between other appointments? It's all there in those first few moments.

This one is going to be a pleasure!

Elbert's an interesting subject. He lives in and raised his two kids in Maple Grove. Two years ago, he retired from being vice president of event production at Ameriprise Financial to pursue his dream job in the movie industry. It doesn't



Shooting *Ice House* on frozen Lake Mille Lacs in both calm and turbulent weather.

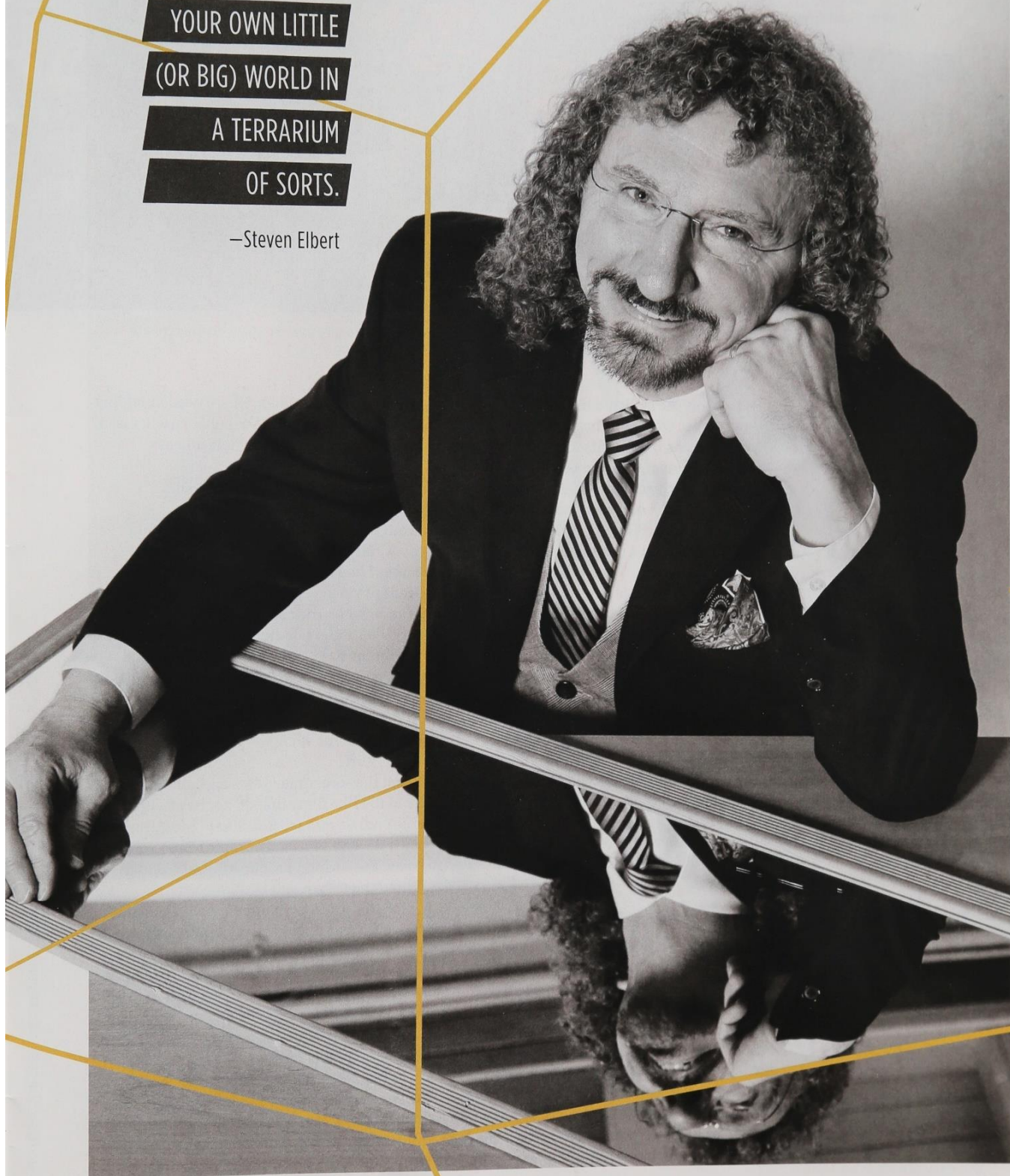
require a totally new skill set on Elbert's part, but it equates to entering an entirely different world; one in which one must raise money, assemble talent, manage timetables, harness creative energy and convince others to take a chance on you. It's an arduous journey to bring to life what sits earnestly in mere ink on paper.

By Cyd
Haynes

Photo by
Joel Schnell

MAKING A FILM
IS LIKE CREATING
YOUR OWN LITTLE
(OR BIG) WORLD IN
A TERRARIUM
OF SORTS.

—Steven Elbert



From left: Actors
Roger Wayne, Tabby
DeLaRosby, Steven
Elbert and Greg Berman



TWIN CITIES 2017 FILM FEST FACTS

12,000
People in
attendance

1,000
Films submitted

123
Films selected
for the festival

5
Films given
additional
showings

5
Films sold out

STEVEN ELBERT
New Century Pictures,
newcenturypictures.com



During the filming of the psychological thriller, *Ice House*, the two main characters are drawn deeper and deeper into intrigue while ice fishing.

Elbert has the skill and the will to make movies. Of course, having worked at Ameriprise has its benefits. Financial advisors at the company helped position him to be able to take early retirement. And he pooled the talents of a lot of his ex-coworkers to get his first film made. Elbert acknowledges this. "Not everyone is in a position to go after their dreams," he says.

That first film of his new dream career has already seen a measure of success. It was chosen as an "Official Selection" of the 2017 Twin Cities Film Fest, previewed to a sold-out audience and was given an additional showing. The movie *Ice House* was shot entirely in Minnesota. Most of the exteriors were filmed on Lake Mille Lacs and the interiors in the Minneapolis area. A western scene was shot in Paynesville. Nearly all the underwater scenes were filmed in the dive pool at the Going Under Dive Center in Osseo, with insert shots captured on Weaver Lake.

I continue diving into the story as our food arrives:

WHEN DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER AN INTEREST IN FILM?

I am originally from Willmar, Minnesota. I took a film studies class in high school. We were given an assignment to either write a paper on the history of filmmaking or shoot a short film. That was a no-brainer for me—make a short film. I fell in love with the whole technical and creative process.

Making a film is like creating your own little (or big) world in a terrarium of sorts—arranging what appears in the frame to create a cer-

tain look and feel. Then, where needed, adding sound design and music to enhance what is in the terrarium. I love the whole process.

HOW DID YOUR TIME AT AMERIPRISE FUEL A FILM CAREER?

I retired after a 32-year career, so I could focus full-time on my passion. During my career I had the opportunity to work on hundreds of video projects and direct thousands of actors. I learned so much working with very smart and talented corporate executives; with some great actors and actresses, and with some of the best creative and technical crews in the industry.

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR *ICE HOUSE* COME FROM?

I read the screenplay years ago and really liked it. I like films that do not have a predictable ending, and *Ice House* kept me guessing until the end. A friend of mine (Patrick Mills) wrote the script. I produced, directed and edited the movie.

Ice House is a psychological thriller. I am a fan of Hitchcock and the Coen Brothers, and *Ice House* has some similar characteristics of their films. The story is about two "friends" with hidden agendas in a fish house on Lake Mille Lacs. I was intrigued by the challenge of making a film that is confined to a smaller space—the fish house.

I often think about when the *Cheers* TV series was originally pitched; a highly successful show that was mainly shot in one location—the bar. One of the things that made it so successful and interesting to me were



the characters. The film has some manipulative, interesting and rather twisted characters that show their true selves as the movie progresses. I also liked the fact that *Ice House* takes place in Minnesota.

HOW DID YOU FINANCE THE FILM?

Most of the financing was from people who saw my work [while at Ameriprise]. In addition, Minnesota has a film incentive program called Snowbate. Films that qualify receive a 20 to 25 percent refund for most Minnesota expenses. The Minnesota Film and TV Board runs the Snowbate program and has a great staff that goes above and beyond to help get movies shot in Minnesota.

WHAT ARE YOUR UPCOMING PROJECTS?

I have optioned a sci-fi script from a writer who worked at Warner Brothers. It is about artificial intelligence in the near future—kind of a mix between *iRobot* and *The Terminator*. I wrote a sci-fi time travel story that involves the secret service and the next president of the United States. My experience of working with the secret service when we had high profile political people at our [Ameriprise] events inspired me to write this screenplay.

I also recently read a love story about forbidden love that I really like. I am also in discussion right now to option a book written by a former NFL player. He has a very passionate and heart-wrenching story to tell about his years playing



professional football.

Elbert is full of ideas; a good trait for a storyteller. He's begun shooting a couple of other projects in development. He's always looking for new feature-length scripts. It will be intriguing to keep an eye out for his future work.

He's a good listener and we talk even as we stand up and move away from the table. Busy in conveying his next thought he leaves his to-go box on the table. I point it out, and without skipping a beat, he scoops it up and we continue the conversation out the exit. **MG**