

A Tale of Two Toledos: Two filmmakers create a love letter to the world's first sister cities

By Alan Abrams

La Prensa Senior Correspondent

The scene opens with an extreme CU of Jacob David. He is sitting at a table and talking to an interviewer.

The camera then pans away to show Joel Washing seated next to him. Washing is also intently answering questions.

There is a flow between the two men that is near perfect. David will start to formulate a reply and Washing will finish his sentence seamlessly. Neither man misses a beat.

These are the two 28-year-old filmmakers who, through their talent and industry, are creating the Two Toledos film documentary. The film is a tribute to the sister cities link between Toledo, Spain and Toledo, Ohio.

Established in 1931, it was the first of its kind.

David and Washing are telling the story by focusing upon the rich art history of both Toledos, showcasing the talent and personal stories of the hardworking artists of both cities.

Toledo, Spain is known for its sword blades and El Greco, and Toledo, Ohio is famous for glass and the Toledo Art Museum—all significant contributions to the world of art and creativity. To honor the traditions of two great cities, David and Washing came up with the innovative concept of telling the stories of contemporary artists in both countries. Their documentary is the first film to offer an in-depth look at what these two cities have to offer each other in the realms of art and culture.

The completed film will be broadcast next May in both cities on public television. It will be shown on WGTE TV-30 and Radio Television de Castilla—La Mancha. It will also be distributed on DVD and VHS to organizations in both Toledos, such as the public libraries and sister cities organizations. Each country will receive the film with appropriate subtitles.

Serendipity has virtually been the third partner of Jacob David and Joel Washing in the creation of this film.

Friends since 1993, when both were sophomores in Sylvania Southview High School, David and Washing went on to the University of Toledo where they studied film.

“The theatre and film department at the University of Toledo used to focus more upon theatre, but now more there is more of an emphasis upon film,” explains Washing. “You start on film production almost from day one as a film major. They used to require you to take film theory training before they would even let you touch a camera, but that’s changed.”

David is the son of Jacqueline and Sargis David. They are the owners of the popular 25-year old sandwich shop on South Broadway—*The Original Sub Shop & Deli*—near the main post office. Washing’s mother, Virginia, lives in Sylvania. His father, Robert, is deceased.

David earned a B.A. in film from the University of Toledo and is an alumnus of the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University. Washing spent four years at UT where he completed courses in film/video production and theory. He is a member of the International Documentary Association of Los Angeles.

“Since we went to UT together for our film degrees, we had to do foreign language credits. So in 2001, we went to Salamanca in Salamanca, Spain to learn Spanish. We spent three months of intense learning covering what would have taken us three semesters here. We were there before and during 9/11,” explains David.

“While we were in Salamanca, there was a one-day excursion to Toledo. We knew of the connection to Toledo, Ohio, so we had to go because of the name. So without knowing anything else about it, we spent about ten hours there,” adds Washing.

They were impressed with the 15th Century architecture and the churches. But after that day, they went back to their routine. “We were still students; we had no plans for major films. Then Jacob graduated and I put my education on hiatus,” says Washing.

That’s when more serendipity came into play.

The two met John Henry Fullen, the then-executive director of the Toledo Sister Cities International program. “That chance meeting planted a seed—Fullen told us ‘you should make a movie’. He knew we had been in film school. We thought, that’s a good idea. Where do we go with the story?” recalls David.

David realized that timing could be everything. The 75th anniversary of the Two Toledos sister cities link will be celebrated in May 2006, and next year is also the 50th anniversary of the Sister Cities International organization.

So the two began preparing overviews and started to seek financing. One of the first they approached was Toledo’s Pizza King, Pasquale “Pat” Giammarco of Marco’s Pizza. He not only pledged support to the project but gave Washing a job at his main Monroe street store.

As the two filmmakers began to explore other sources of

funding, they connected with The Association of Two Toledos, the organization originally founded in 1931 as The Committee on Relations with Toledo, Spain.

After budgeting their pre-production costs, David and Washing spent six weeks in Toledo, Spain this January and February doing research and meeting people they wanted to film.

They came back to Ohio on March 1 and spent March, April, and May in fundraising and doing research on the Toledo, Ohio side of story. That included finding artists here they wanted to include in the film. They are not ready to reveal which artists will make the final cut.

They returned to Spain to film in June. But that was the easy part.

“Because the focus is upon culture and art, during our first visit we met and interviewed more than 30 artists. We have now narrowed down those we will highlight to six or eight,” says David.

The criterion for interviewing subjects was influenced by several factors. Both David and Washing created their individual top-ten list out of the 30 interviews. Their lists came up almost exact—they only varied by one name.

“During 1997, Toledo, Spain sent nine artists here in an exchange program through Sister Cities International. Some of the artists we interviewed were part of that 1997 cultural exchange, and they share their memories of their trip here in the film,” explains Washing.

The finished product will run at least an hour, which is a public television requirement. The filmmakers are mulling a longer version on DVD. The film will include musicians from both Toledos. David and Washing were impressed by what they term Folk Spanish music. It is heavily Celtic influenced as it originates from Spain’s Galicia region, which has often been compared to Ireland.

What will a typical segment on an artist in the film depict? David says they will not be too long. “We ask a few questions, pick a location—usually in their studio and film them at work.

“These are works in progress. That’s why we show the artists’ work process. We ask them more about their lives in the city, the relationship of their work to the city, how the city influences their life. We ask them to pick their favorite spot in the city. That’s usually a corner in the middle of the old city,” says David.

“We want to depict the relationship of art to society. We



Joel Washing and Jacob David filming Toledo, Spain this summer, as pictured at left.

want to show how cultural exchange benefits the city and its citizens, and show how art in general is beneficial to people,” he adds.

A major coup for the filmmakers came in February when the president of the Association of Two Toledos told them the Toledo Diocesan Choir was coming to Toledo, Spain. “We met with the choir director in March, and we knew we had to be back there by June 19 when the choir would be performing,” recalls Washing.

“We were able to film them in a great performance. We spent two days with them, attending their concert and going to dinner and to their official reception by the mayor. We couldn’t film their Sunday mass at 11 [*ante meridiem*], but we were supplied with tape of it, TV quality, for the DVD. We were able to film their evening performance at another church. It was standing room only,” says David.

Washing said there were about 25 people from Toledo in the contingent.

“We also received a lot of help from Russell Brown, the son of Russell G.C. Brown, a Spanish teacher at Waite and DeVilbiss high schools, who was one of the original founders of the Committee on Relations with Toledo, Spain.

“He had, and shared, a lot of first-hand knowledge of how the Association developed over the years. He has gone back and forth to Toledo, Spain since the 1960s. A professor of Spanish at Muskingum College, he has taken a group of students over to Spain every summer. He has just retired, so this year was his last trip,” says Washing.

David and Washing estimate they will spend two months shooting the Toledo, Ohio segments and finish editing the film in December or January for its premiere next May.

Which sister city will actually see it first at the world premiere?

The filmmakers aren’t sure yet. They hope to bring over some of the Toledo, Spain artists for the premiere showing.

David and Washing have formed a production company they’ve named *Above the Shop Studios*. They originally

had planned to build a film studio above the David family’s sandwich shop on Broadway. The upstairs space is now the headquarters for an organization of Toledo filmmakers, and David and Washing hope to be able to provide film editing space to the burgeoning Toledo film community.

“When we started, we were told by some people that no one would want to see a film about Toledo. Now here we are doing it,” says David.

Editor’s Note: According to the University of Toledo’s web site [<http://library.utoledo.edu/canaday/mssguide/mss-071.html>], the history of the *Association of Two Toledos*: “began in the 1920s when the University of Toledo President, Dr. Henry Doermann, visited Spain as an affiliate of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and History in Toledo, Spain. [*The photographs taken by Dr. Doermann of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel’s coat of arms inspired the University of Toledo’s official seal.*]

“At the same time, Russell G.C. Brown, a Spanish teacher at Waite and DeVilbiss high schools, encouraged the students in his Spanish clubs to correspond with students studying English in Toledo, Spain. Doermann and Brown, together with people they had met in Toledo, Spain, formed the Committee on Relations with Toledo, Spain in 1931. Dr. Doermann and Russell Brown led the organization in Toledo, Ohio, while Toledo, Spain’s mayor, Guillermo Perezagua and Adoración Cómez Camarero, editor of the city’s newspaper, led the organization in Toledo, Spain.

“In 1934, a delegation was sent from Toledo, Ohio to Toledo, Spain. “Fiesta Week” in Toledo, Ohio corresponded with the trip. The celebration

included an exhibition of Spanish art at the Toledo Museum of Art. A delegation from Toledo, Spain planned to visit Ohio in 1937 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of Toledo, Ohio, but the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and World War II disrupted those plans.

“The Committee remained inactive until 1958. However, informal communications were maintained between Russell Brown of the American committee and Pablo Rodríguez of the Spanish committee.

“In 1962, a group from Toledo, Spain visited Toledo, Ohio as part of the celebration of Toledo, Ohio’s 125-year history. In 1965, twenty-eight area high school students visited Toledo, Spain. A scholarship encouraging intercultural education was established in honor of Russell Brown in the late 1960s. A similar scholarship was established in Toledo, Spain in 1971, thereby starting an exchange program.

“Sister Cities International recognized the Toledo, Ohio branch of the Committee for this exchange program by awarding it the Town Affiliation Award in 1962 and an award for the “best people-to-people project” for fundraising to support the scholarship program.

“In 1976, a delegation from Toledo, Spain again came to Toledo, Ohio, this time to celebrate the United States bicentennial. The two branches celebrated the 50th anniversary of their relationship in 1981 with a yearlong celebration in Toledo, Ohio. In 1982, the members voted to change the name of the organization from “Committee on Relations with Toledo, Spain” to “Association of Two Toledos.” That same year, the Association sponsored an exhibit at the Toledo Museum of Art of works by El Greco.”

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