



PHOTO BY MARY BETH HARTILL

ACTING COUPLE: Claire Calarco and hubby, former AHSS English and theatre arts teacher Jim Calarco, would like to see the Northern Ontario film industry really take off.

Former teacher busy with second career

Mary Beth Hartill
News Staff

ALMAGUIN – When Jim Calarco got bit by the acting bug, he got bit hard. It has been an all-consuming passion that keeps him active, despite retirement from his career as teacher.

He was hired as an English teacher at Almaguin Highlands Secondary School (AHSS) in 1969 and after a year at the school he was urged by then principal John McDermott to take on theatre. However, it wasn't until he taught theatre for two years that he had his first theatre experience.

"I did three plays a year and turned professional in 1973," he said, adding that it had been his wife, Claire, who had been the actor in the family.

In 1984 he was cast for his first movie, *Street Smart*, starring Christopher Reeve, only to find out later that he had been cut out of the movie.

Jim can be spotted sitting in an airplane in the movie *Serendipity* as one of 18 films he has been cast as lead background.

"It's a great way to get into the business," he said.

Jim retired from teaching on June 30, 2000. By July 1 he was in Toronto and working on set on July 3.

He stayed in his little flat on the Danforth living like a true artist and cooking on a hotplate despite owning a lovely home in Callander.

"I was 53 in 2000. I had tons of auditions," he said. "I had about 50 auditions before being hired as the Midas duck."

Jim and Claire now live in North Bay and are happy to report that the film industry seems to be following them with some

production moving away from Toronto.

The couple now runs Pair of Ducks Productions.

"Claire and I always wanted to do something together," said Jim. "Why don't we start our own company and hire ourselves?"

The production company is taking off. Their short film *That Was Easy* won best screenplay at the 2008 Music and Film in Motion (MFM) Awards and placed third as CTV Best Shorts Winner at CINEFEST'08.

Pair of Ducks Productions also produced a short film called *It Started With Rabbits*.

Jim has a number of accolades to show for his love of the craft including best actor at the Quonta Festival, Pantomime and Movement at the Canadian Mime Theatre and was inducted into the North Bay Musician and Entertainer Hall of Fame in 2009.

Currently, Pair of Ducks are working on a documentary short about a bodybuilder from Astorville who suffered a stroke and continues training for competition this August, set on winning.

"It's a human interest piece," said Jim, who is also working on what he calls a supernatural short film that has no working title at the moment but is set for release in November if possible.

"We're supposed to be retired," he said, adding that they have a number of projects on the go including working as background talent in a commercial for Tourism Ontario, auditioning for a new Kids in the Hall movie and doing production work on upcoming projects coming to North Bay.

The couple show no signs of slowing down as their careers in the arts takes flight.

Slow aging rate with blueberries

(You've never seen a bear with wrinkles, have you?)

Millions of people enjoy blueberries because they taste good and are versatile enough to be part of many different menu items. Blueberries, however, are also nutrient-rich and offer a host of health benefits, one of which may be slowing down the aging process.

This isn't to say that blueberries can turn back the hands of time, but they may help slow down some of the typical side effects of aging, most notably diminished mental capacity. In a USDA Human Nutrition Research Centre laboratory study, researchers fed blueberry extractions to lab mice. The extractions were the equivalent of a human eating one cup of blueberries per day. The mice were then run through a series of motor tests. The mice who were given the blueberry extractions performed better than the control group on motor functions and memory. They also showed an increase of exploratory behavior.

The antioxidant components of blueberries that give them their vivid color help reduce oxidative stress. Oxidative stress is damage to cell membranes and DNA from free radicals. Antioxidants are known to find and eradicate free radicals. Oxidative stress

is thought to be a main culprit in many of the dysfunctions and diseases common to aging.

By 2050 it is estimated that more than 30 per cent of the North American population will be over 65. It's likely that these individuals will be interested in looking and feeling their best for years to come.

Because of their neurological, motor-function link, blueberries may be essential to reducing the severity of neurological diseases, such as Alzheimer's and other dementias.

Apart from anti-aging properties, blueberries and their antioxidants can help with general health as well. There have been links to diets rich in blueberries and urinary tract health due to reduction of the adhesion of bacteria. Plus, blueberries may play a role in preventing certain cancers and cardiac issues.

Individuals interested in adding blueberries to their diet can do so in many ways. Whether enjoying blueberries atop cereals, on muffins or simply straight out of the refrigerator, incorporating servings of this fruit into a diet can be beneficial and delicious.



HEALTHY AND DELICIOUS: Blueberries may be instrumental to reducing oxidative stress, which is known to compromise motor function in aging people.

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