

Belton Mouras Jr.
Photo by Aniko Kiezel

Lights, Camera, Sacramento!

SHORT FILM HIGHLIGHTS OUR CITY'S NATURAL BEAUTY

If you jog along the American River Parkway and spot a tree with gnarled roots dangling over the riverbank, stop and say hello to "Mickey's Tree."

It's a bit of Sacramento immortalized in the 40-minute movie of the same name by local filmmaker and composer Belton Mouras Jr.

"I've had so many adventures out there," Mouras says of the trail he pounded thousands of times as a triathlete.

Recalling his late rescue dog, he adds, "Mickey and I would be out there almost every day and he led me to that tree.

By Jessica Laskey
Meet Your Neighbor

It's exhilarating to be out there. A lot of people don't get to experience the parkway to that degree, so I wanted to showcase all the nature that's available to us right here in the film."

"Mickey's Tree" is Mouras' debut film, but he's worked on many creative projects as a composer and artist. Mouras was drawn to music early thanks to his mother, an avid pianist, and father, a Louisiana Cajun with roots in Zydeco, rockabilly, jazz and blues.

"Growing up playing music and then starting visual art, I realized that being a music composer is the perfect blend of the visual and auditory," Mouras says. "To me, it's just natural. Music brings the life and energy into the movie. You can have a great film, but the music brings in the juice."

The movie bug bit the Carmichael resident when he agreed to serve as a producer for a friend's film. After hanging out on set and landing a small role, Mouras fell in love with the medium and produced a short documentary project in Louisiana in memory of his father. He wrote musical scores for other short films, including one in the 2012 "A Place Called Sacramento" Film Festival.

After Mouras retired from his day job as a real estate investor, he found himself with time on his hands. He built a creative outlet by writing, directing, producing and composing "Mickey's Tree."

"I wrote the script, grabbed a friend to be the technical director and the magic took over from there," Mouras says.

He assembled the production team and a cast of local actors. Filming took 10 days in October 2021. The project wrapped last May and received its world premiere at the Palm Springs International ShortFest in June 2022, followed by a local premiere at the Esquire IMAX Theatre.

"I wanted to make this film as a way to thank Sacramento for being so supportive of me and my friends and family over the years," Mouras says. "I also wanted to incorporate the human-animal bond and other parts of recovery. Hopefully it will inspire others to hang in there no matter what they're facing."

Mouras is at work on his second film, an adventure feature shot in Costa Rica due out in 2024. Mouras has visited Costa Rica nearly every year for the past 15 years and hopes to highlight the country's biodiversity. He's made about 20 tracks for the new soundtrack, perhaps his favorite part of the production process.

"I learned so much making 'Mickey's Tree,'" Mouras says. "There were so many new learning curves. I had to be OK asking for help. But it was an incredible experience. I think everybody has the creative spirit in them, but life gets busy and it gets buried. When you get a chance at a creative outlet, go for it."

"Mickey's Tree" is available to rent on Amazon Prime and mickeystree.com.

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