

He speaks for the trees through film

Tom Engebretson's camera shows damage done

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GALESBURG - Tom Engebretson of Galesburg is probably better known for his work as a therapist at Bridgeway than as a filmmaker, but two of his one-minute features were shown at this year's Black Earth Film Festival, which concludes today. "Make Way for Shopping Nirvana," is a cynical look at changes taking place as a new shopping center is built at U.S. 34 and Seminary Street, especially the trees being butchered to make way for a wider Seminary Street.

"I have been obsessed by the hacked trees of Galesburg since I moved here," Engebretson said.

A number of shots of trees gave the movies an eerie feel, as the trees formed a mutated, ugly Stonehenge.

He has been making short films for about 10 years but has only been entering them in film festivals for the past three years, including one in Tulsa, Okla.

"I always drag my friends and family into the movies," he laughed, adding that is one reason he enjoys "American Movie," the featured flick shown Saturday night at the Orpheum Theatre.

"They're certainly a lot more eccentric than I am, Engebretson said of "American Movie" stars Mark Borchardt and Mike Schank.

"I have a lot of ideas for short films."

The other Engebretson film this year, "Mystery of the Historic District," indeed was a mystery, referring to tree monkeys being released in Galesburg in the mid-1980s but warning visitors they may not spot the primates.

Asked about the monkeys, Engebretson said they were at the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago last summer and he noticed that the trees looked much like those in Galesburg when the giraffes were done eating. Disappointed he did not have his camera, he called officials at Glen Oak Zoo in Peoria. Through a misunderstanding, he was expecting giraffes at Glen Oak, but he was told they will have giraffes when the zoo expansion is completed. Initially frustrated, he came up with an idea.

"I filmed the monkeys," he said. "My idea was like this herd of Sasquatch giraffes were what did that damage to the trees (in Galesburg) at night."

As it turned out, the monkeys were quite content nibbling on tree limbs as he filmed them, making for excellent stand-ins.