

# 2008 PIONEER OF THE YEAR

*by Eugene Amodeo*

They told me “don’t call us, we’ll call you” and they didn’t! Knowing I wanted to work in the film industry, I called every single film and theatre circuit company asking if they needed anyone. That was in June 1963 and there were no bites. So I went for an interview to be a shipper at a manufacturing company, which would pay \$60 a week. I needed typing for that job and they told me they would keep the job open for me if I took training on an electric typewriter. At the same time in late August, I got a call from Famous Players Theatres Corporation to come in for an interview. They had kept my name on file from my phone call. I said no to the shipping job and started in the Famous audit department making \$40 a week.

During my audit department years, I wanted to move to the booking department, but I was always overlooked. So in 1967, I was offered a job in the film settlement department which I took. It was alright but I still wanted to be a booker. No such luck! After a year, I quit Famous Players making \$90.00 a week and decided to move to Vancouver to “find myself”. Well, not only did I not “find myself” but I couldn’t find a job either – of course it didn’t help that my door to door search requesting employment made me thirsty and at 2 o’clock in the afternoon I usually ended up in a pub feeling sorry for myself! I finally got a job as a runner for a customs broker company at \$50 a week. I lasted a week and returned to Toronto, it was Easter 1968. Back in T.O. and looking for a job, Paramount Pictures was advertising for an accounting assistant. I applied and got the job immediately. You see, Paramount and Famous were affiliated and I guess that’s how I got the job. I spent 2 years at Paramount and when the General Manager left to head up a new distribution company called National General Pictures, he took me with him as well as his secretary. I was now the “accountant” at this new company, it was 1970 and I have no recollection of my salary. In 1972, as luck would have it, the booker decided to leave. I got the chance to do what I had always wanted – to be a booker! As the one and only booker there, I had to learn fast – booking the whole country, learning direct circuits in each of the provinces from Arcola, Saskatchewan to Napanee, Ontario. Friday nights were awful when I would receive calls from the theatres wondering where the print was!

However, I persevered and somehow muddled through it all! In 1974, National General sold to Warner Brothers and I was out of a job....but only for a month. I started at Astral Films as the Head Booker and eventually became the Sales Manager. At that time, Columbia Pictures had a deal with Astral to book the independent theatres in Canada and one of the functions of my job was to be the liaison between them.....and my migraines started! In 1980, Universal Pictures called. The Branch Manager position opened up and they wanted ME! I was in shock and at the same time thrilled. I was so excited to be part of a “MAJOR”....my migraines disappeared. I’d like to think that I got the job because of my experience but you also need to be “in the right place, at the right time”. In 1981, I became the youngest Vice President and General Manager in the Canadian film industry. By 2002, I was elevated to Senior Vice President and General Manager but not the youngest anymore. Regardless, the excitement and the passion is still here for me after 28 ½ years with Universal. Thank you to all my friends and colleagues and especially my family who have supported and helped me along the way, to be the best that I can be. Thank you to the Picture Pioneers for this great honour, the Picture Pioneers is a truly great charitable organization that I am proud to be a part of. I encourage everyone in our industry to volunteer, participate and support the Pioneers every way possible in order for them to continue their great work for those in need.

*Ciao, Gene*



*“There’s no business like show business....”* Born in Toronto, I am one of 10 children including 2 sets of twins. My love for the movies started at 6 years old. My mother took my twin brother, Arthur and I to the magnificent theatre called “The Odeon Toronto” at the corner of Yonge & Carlton streets to see Walt Disney’s “Cinderella” in Easter of 1950. The theatre is gone now, but my first memory of actually going to a theatre has stayed with me all these years.

Through grade school, instead of studies my focus was on movies and I would run home to open the entertainment section and drool over the movie ads! Nothing has changed as I still do that today, although the ads have drastically changed. Back in the ‘50’s, there was a set pattern where a movie would play 1st run – exclusive most of the time and move to different theatres. I knew exactly what theatre the movie would move to. Those were the fun days! In 1963, I graduated (I have no idea how!) from high school and now needed to find a job. Looking at the want-ads, I discovered an ad requesting a mail-boy at Twentieth Century Fox. I applied for the job. The application included “salary expected”. I put down \$50 a week. WRONG AMOUNT TO REQUEST!



## ANCILLARY AWARD RECIPIENT



It's appropriate that I am writing this piece over Thanksgiving, as it was 25 years ago this weekend that I began my career in the film business.

Yikes! Where have all those years gone?

I had always been an avid filmgoer and, while growing up, spent many hours at the old Famous and Odeon twins and the Mustang Drive-in in Guelph. As a young adult I studied Social Work at McMaster University and then used family connections to secure a job with a small Calgary-based publishing company that specialized in the agriculture and funeral service industries. Like a whole lot of other Ontario kids at that time, I moved west to "find myself". I became a Sales & Field Representative and ended up finding myself in barns, fields and sales arenas everywhere from Balzac to Toronto, selling ad space and designing campaigns for cattle breeders. Ultimately, I missed my family and friends quite a bit more than I could imagine.

The film industry wasn't yet my calling, but I was drawn to the chaotic pace of magazine publishing and print production, so returned to Ontario to study Graphic Arts Management at Ryerson. On Thanksgiving weekend of 1983 I was wandering home along Carlton Street when the lights of the local art house caught my eye. The foreign language films featured on the marquee first attracted me, then the "Cafe Staff Wanted" sign and the promise of great wages (Ha!); but it was the offer of FREE movies that sealed the deal. I was hired to work in the cafe that same afternoon.

I spent the next 12 years working with Cineplex in operations at five local theatres and in advertising at their offices on King Street West and Yonge Street. As many of you know, it was a very dynamic time to be working in the exhibition business. As chaotic as work got at times, we always had a whole lot of fun...and I learned to love purple. All kidding aside, I learned an abundance of lessons during those years that still resonate today.

There was a time when I couldn't even conceive of leaving Cineplex. As things started to change in the advertising end of the business and new players arrived, I was approached by Drew (Conlin) and offered a position to head up a new production team that would focus on newspaper advertising and support the buying that would be done by Allied. The opportunity to work with Michael (Goldberg) & Joel (Reitman) and their team of professionals at Mijo Corporation was one that I could not refuse.

It was a BIG transition for me, one that afforded me all kinds of new experiences. I started down a road that would ultimately lead to Alliance and the distribution side of the business.

Alliance had been a client of mine for many years, while I worked at Cineplex. I had also taken vacation time during TIFF for many, many years and volunteered in the Alliance press office, so let's just say that I donned my Alliance tattoo long before I actually received my first pay cheque as an employee.

I started full-time with Alliance in 1998—on the day that the merger with Atlantis was announced—and arrived to find the 15<sup>th</sup> Floor at 121 Bloor Street East completely devoid of people. Frank (Mendicino) and Victor (Loewy) had promised that life at Alliance would never be boring and predictable. They have delivered on that promise almost every day for the last ten years. During the past decade, which has gone by far too quickly, I have had the good fortune to help release remarkable films and had the pleasure to work with wonderful people.

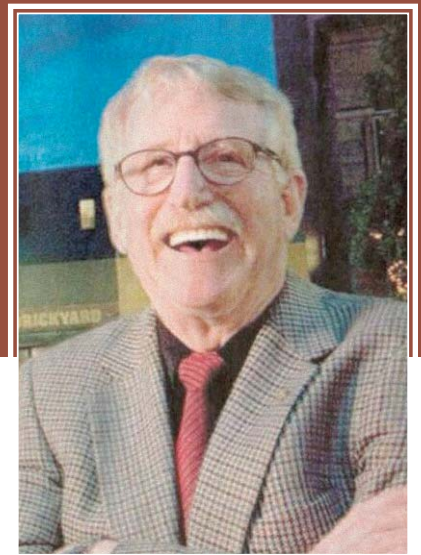
I am a lucky lady in so many ways.

I have a job that I LOVE. It challenges me each and every day, but never in the same way twice. It makes the trip in from Guelph completely worthwhile!

I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Eugene (Amodeo) on being named 2008 Pioneer of the Year, as well as my fellow Ancillary Award recipients: Pierre (Gauthier), Dan (McGrath) and Michael (Mosca).

Margaret Burnside

## ANCILLARY AWARD RECIPIENT



Pierre Gauthier has been living and breathing movies since taking his first steps as a child in Quesnel, where his grandfather A.J. Elliott owned the Rex Theatre. He began in the late 1940s by selling popcorn that was popped in Vancouver and brought into Quesnel by Greyhound bus, before the theatre even had a candy bar.

He spent his formative years selling candy, cleaning the theatre and standing on a Coke box rewinding films first for A.J. and then for his father Paul Gauthier, who bought the theatre in 1947. Six years later, Paul Gauthier built a new theatre, the Carib, where Pierre worked, with time out to attend school in Vancouver, and later helped build his father's drive-in theatre, the Casbar.

In 1961 he moved to Calgary and worked with the Barrons, who owned four theatres in partnership with Odeon. A decade later, they sold to Odeon, with Pierre continuing to work for Odeon at the Grand Theatre, where he continued his duties as theatre manager.

Pierre has fond memories of playing the James Bond picture, Dr. No; the early Clint Eastwood pictures and his favourite movie, Ship of Fools. The Bond films drew crowds of moviegoers standing outside, waiting for hours in temperatures as low as 30° below. A standout memory was the time that the Steve McQueen classic The Great Escape drew record business, and during Stampede week. History repeated itself in 1975, when the first Jaws picture attracted record crowds.

In those years, Pierre traveled across Canada training managers in concessions. Cut to 1981, when Pierre was transferred to Victoria, despite reservations by senior management that Pierre was "too wild for Victoria." They agreed, however, and Pierre has been a fixture on the cultural scene of B.C.'s capital city ever since as manager of the Odeon.

One of his most fulfilling achievements was facilitating the transformation from a twin-cinema to a state-of-the-art seven-plex over the course of 20 years.

During his tenure at the Odeon, Pierre has earned a high-profile for his colourful showmanship and hospitality that has gone above-and-beyond what many theatregoers have come to expect in these changing times. His personality and efforts to keep Yates Street free of crime and other urban ailments, his seven-iron at the ready, have earned him the moniker "the Mayor of Yates Street" and frequent mentions in media articles and broadcast reports.

Cineplex co-founder Garth Drabinsky once said of Pierre in an interview with a Victoria journalist: "They don't make theatre managers like Pierre anymore."

Pierre Gauthier

## ANCILLARY AWARD RECIPIENT



Dan's career in the film industry started in 1987 when, shortly after attaining his Chartered Accountant designation, he was hired by Ellis Jacob and joined Cineplex Odeon Films as Assistant Controller. He held various financial roles at Cineplex through some tumultuous times until 1994, when he made the move to theatre operations and became Vice President, Operations for Canada and the United States. When Cineplex was purchased by Loews in 1998, he was promoted to Senior Vice President, Operations for Canada.

In 2000, Dan left Cineplex to join Ellis once again at Galaxy Cinemas as Executive Vice President. He played key roles in the 2003 merger of Cineplex and Galaxy to form the Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund and also in the 2005 acquisition of Famous Players. In his current capacity as Executive Vice President for Cineplex Entertainment, Dan is responsible for corporate strategy, theatre operations, merchandising, real estate and business development, design and construction, customer strategies (which includes marketing, loyalty and interactive media), communications and Cineplex Media.

Dan is Director and Treasurer for both the Motion Picture Theatre Association of Canada and the Motion Picture Theatre Association of Ontario and is a strong supporter of the Canadian Picture Pioneers. He also sits on the Board of Canada's Walk of Fame.

Dan feels very lucky and honoured to have worked in this exciting industry for over 21 years, to have had so many great experiences and to have met so many great people. He has been supported throughout his career by his beautiful wife Kerry and his wonderful 14 year old twins, Matt and Kira.

Dan McGrath

## ANCILLARY AWARD RECIPIENT



### MICHAEL MOSCA

#### Senior Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer Equinoxe Films Inc.

Michael started in the industry during the Summer of 1979 at the Capitol Theatre in Kingston while attending Queen's University.

Moved to Toronto to join Odeon as Assistant Manager at the Finch, Dufferin Drive-In and Albion before moving over to Cineplex in 1981. Assistant Manager at the Eaton Centre, opened up the Carlton and as a thank you – got transferred as Manager to Thunder Bay!!!

A year later, came back to Toronto to manage Cineplex's flagship, Eaton Centre. Opened Market Square and initiated (yes, he's the culprit) \$2.00 Tuesdays.

Transferred to Québec as Director of Operations in 1985, Michael put an end to union activities on the employee level and Québec remained union-free until his departure in 1993.

Joined France Film as Director Video Canada in 1995 and became Vice-President of France Film in 1996. Took the provincial distributor national in 2000 under a new banner, Equinoxe Films and became its Senior Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer.

During his tenure at Equinoxe, Michael has made an indelible mark by acquiring and overseeing the release of *The Passion of The Christ*, which earned \$25 million at the Canadian box office, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, which earned more than \$30 million at the Canadian box office and the hit comedy *Mambo Italiano*, which has become one of the highest grossing English Canadian films, earning \$5.5 million at the box office in its Canadian theatrical release, with sales to more than 40 international territories.

Michael has been involved in a number of films that allow creative talent to showcase their abilities. Among them *Les fantômes des trois Madeleine*, which was selected for the Directors Fortnight at the 2000 Cannes International Film Festival; *The Perfect Son*, which received two Best Actor Genie Award nominations for Colm Feore and David Cubitt; Clement Virgo's *Love Come Down*, nominated for nine Genie Awards, including Best Film; and Edoardo Ponti's *Between Strangers* starring Sophia Loren, which received four Genie Award nominations.

In 2004, Michael initiated the formation of the company's production arm, Equinoxe Productions, which has already produced five feature films: *Un dimanche à Kigali (A Sunday in Kigali)*; *La belle bête; La Capture; Maman est chez le coiffeur*, directed by Léa Pool; and *24 mesures*, a co-production with France. Of particular note, the company's first production, *Un dimanche à Kigali (A Sunday in Kigali)*, earned more than \$1 million at the box office in Québec alone, and was honoured with eight Genie Award nominations, including Best Film, 12 Jutra Award nominations, including Best Film, and it also received two Best Film Awards at various film festivals.

Michael is President of the Motion Pictures Pioneers Association of Québec and is also a Member of the Board of Equinoxe Films, Bureau of Cinema & Television Québec and Ciné-Québec.

Michael Mosca