

Web Exclusive

12/1/2019

Green Gone Hollywood

Bill Calkins



If you need to help your son or daughter make a model of Mars, perhaps you'd head to the local garden center for a bag of tan moss and some dried twigs to create an interplanetary look. Simple enough.

But imagine creating a full-blown [Martian landscape in which John Carter wakes up](#), creating a memorable scene in a blockbuster movie—you're going to need a massive amount of moss and a team of people to spray it down with yellow-toned paint. And you'll also need a semi-load of Manzanita and Ghost Wood branches adorned with spray foam alien leaves attached with specially fabricated metal armatures. And once you've built a 370-ft. Earthen mound in the Utah desert, a film crew can finally capture the stunning scene and most likely add computer-generated images that will wow audiences around the world.

But think about it, without plants and greenery, none of this would be possible! And we can all thank owner Bryan McBrien and the team at

Cinema Greens in Atlanta for adding excitement—and horticulture—to many of our favorite TV shows and movies.

Pictured: When Cinema Greens transformed their warehouse into a plant shop, the response was amazing. Now they've established a following.

Bryan has so many stories like the John Carter memory, and each one is amazing because, as he says, "Nothing is too wild." He's built a 30-ft. by 30-ft. greenhouse in the parking lot of Fox Studios in Hollywood to create the survival scene in "Minority Report," which took four months of work and included an education in hydroponic systems. Another movie project, "Furious 7" from the "Fast and Furious" franchise, required semi-loads of scrap pine trees that Bryan and his crew set up using huge metal bases rented from the department of transportation. This was the approach they used because there was no way they could so much as pluck a needle from a living tree while filming on Pikes Peak—yet the script called for massive Gatling guns mowing down huge pine trees left and right.

Yet another challenge Bryan and his greensman tackled was creating what he calls a "[Garden of Eden on a spaceship](#)" for the end of the movie "Passengers." From a giant Pine Oak planted in the ship's deck to 4,000-plus sq. ft. of aged faux turf, the magic was made thanks to years of experience, creative minds and weeks and weeks of hard work.

What's a Greensman?

How'd Bryan get started? In Hollywood, of course, as a "Greensman"! Just about any film set that includes trees, bushes, flowers, vines and living plants, in general, requires a specialized member of the film crew called a Greensman. They handle every aspect of the greenery, including sourcing plant material from local nurseries, procuring faux plants from vendors, renting, planting and maintaining the green scene, and getting very creative because often, the scene is not native or natural in any way.

Put it this way, directors and producers aren't considering the natural bloom time of rose bushes when they ask the production designers to create a summer scene in Central Park ... in Florida... in December. That's where the greensmen come in and when experts like Bryan and Cinema Greens are at their best. The company has been in existence since 2014, but the team members have all been greens coordinators in the film industry for decades. Identifying a need in the industry prompted them to move from California to Georgia and open Cinema Greens.

Atlanta Bound

After working on more and more films and shows in Georgia and living there for months on end, Bryan learned first-hand there was a need for film-quality greenery to supply the rapidly growing film industry in Atlanta.

"The city lacked an infrastructure for film greens," he says. "We needed big plants, like 20-ft. pines, and you just can't buy them at the local greenhouse."

Bryan moved to Atlanta and, with a partner, built 14,000 sq. ft. of greenhouses and procured some initial inventory. Because this is a piece involving Hollywood, you know there's much more to the story. To house the large material required for film sets, the Cinema Greens team purchased and used hoophouses and jacked them up to 22-ft. tall using timbers, allowing them to bring in huge plant material. And most of that stock came from New Orleans. Not from a nursery, but from the set of "Ant Man," which had purchased them from the film crew of "Jurassic World"! With more than \$1 million in tropical plants and palms alone, these movies couldn't begin to dispose of the material and were happy to sell much of what remained (19 semi-truckloads) to Cinema Greens who hauled them to the new facility in Atlanta.

Changing the Event Game

The company started with a focus on film and TV rentals, and set design, but then saw opportunities in the local event industry in Atlanta. Bryan feels Cinema Greens changed the industry quickly.

"We don't just bring in small ficus trees to decorate a convention," he explains. "We get them 20-ft. trees and really fill the space."

And he learned quickly that jobs in the event industry are very much driven by trust and word of mouth. "When designing the greenery for a rapper or big CEO's party, you can't mess it up," he warns.

The lessons learned and ethic developed working on big movie sets makes the necessary attention to detail second nature for the company and is a big reason why the business is expanding so quickly. One of the most recent developments Bryan is super excited about is that Cinema Greens was just named a preferred vendor at the Atlanta Botanical Garden, "the emerald jewel in the crown of Atlanta culture." They're at the top of the list of go-to companies when planning an event at the garden. Bryan's passion for plants and love of the green industry shined through brightly when he discussed this exciting news.

Pop Up & Sell

Sounds like Cinema Greens is about as busy as they can be, considering greensmen working on films usually complete two to three huge projects each year and the event side of the business is quickly expanding, but Bryan and his team have taken on another role in the past year—retail nursery. But not a traditional retail nursery because

how can you be normal when the plants you sell just might have been on the set of "Stranger Things"?

What began as a plant sale in the parking lot of the plant rental greenhouse has now grown substantially because once again ... Hollywood. When "Stranger Things" needed a shopping mall set complete with "mall plantings" from the 1980s, Cinema Greens shipped them up from Florida. When the filming was over, Bryan explains there were plenty of leftover plants to dispose of.

"There was so much stuff, generic stuff and we had to get rid of it," he says. "We had seen some pop-up plant sales and decided to try it—but do it BIG." They set up a plant sale at the warehouse and used Instagram to promote they had plants from movies and shows and attached the movie names to the plants. The response was amazing. Bryan says there were literally people arguing over monsteras used on the sets of hit shows.

These plant sales developed somewhat of a following and customers started asking for smaller plants, since so many of the ones used in films and sold at the first plant sales were large stature specimens. Because Cinema Greens was already ordering larger material from their suppliers in Florida to bump up and grow for film sets, they figured it would be easy to add smaller plants to the orders and fill the trucks up, increasing efficiency and bringing in a whole new mix of plants to sell. But that wasn't quite enough for Bryan. One of his business partners had a big tow-behind trailer they used to haul tools and equipment to movie sets, and they decided to retrofit it to become a pop-up plant truck, which they now take to local breweries in Atlanta to sell plants. "It's a plant truck, but on a big Hollywood scale," Bryan says.

That's a Wrap

With big plants, big ideas and tons of horticultural knowledge, the future of Cinema Greens seems to be wide open. Bryan explains that he's been learning the nursery industry for many years and his experience spans more than 20 states. His team knows the film industry and the amazing effects they've created for mass media is leading to equally amazing designs for events and parties and Atlanta is taking notice. But when Bryan happily explains that one of his top priorities is to always remain conscious of plant health, the spread of disease and pest control strategies, it has to warm our horticultural hearts. **GP**



Pictured: Of course the experienced film set designers at Cinema Greens would create a fantastic visual setting for their warehouse plant sale!



Pictured: Owner Bryan McBrien says his job begins with the required white-collar meetings, but quickly becomes hands-on and labor intensive.