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LYLA FOGGIA, PRINCIPAL

✉ lyla@foggiapr.com ☎ (503) 227 3923 🌐 www.foggiapr.com

CLIENT:

Blue Water Entertainment

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.foggiapr.com

First-ever film on the history of Catalina Island to premiere March 8 on KOCE

Award-winning “Hollywood’s Magical Island – Catalina” recounts why it became a mecca for film stars, music greats, and the thousands who arrived by boat each day

LOS ANGELES – February 22, 2005 – Today, Catalina Island is a picturesque getaway that Southern Californians might visit once or twice in their lifetimes. In its heyday, thousands



flocked to this once world-famous mecca in a single day – lured there by such attractions as the Big Band swing music of such legends as Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, and Les Brown; the world premieres of the first talkie motion pictures; underwater kelp gardens found nowhere else in the world; and endless other man-made and natural wonders.

What you don’t know about this quaint, 22-mile long, eight-mile wide oasis – located just 26 miles (or a one-hour boat ride) off the coast of Los Angeles – has been captured in an award-winning documentary that will premiere on the PBS affiliate, KOCE, on March 8 at 7:30 pm.

Narrated by Emmy-winning actor Peter Coyote, “Hollywood’s Magical Island – Catalina” presents the fascinating history of California’s own paradise isle through rare 16 mm

footage, never-before-seen vintage photographs, and interviews with celebrities, island historians, and a Wrigley heir.

“Hollywood’s Magical Island” received The Audience Award from the 2004 Temecula Film Festival. The film has also been showcased in the Marco Island (FL), Ojai, Big Bear Lake, Wine Country (Napa Valley), Pacific Palisades, and Newport Beach Film Festivals.

Filmed over a period of several years by first-time director Greg Reitman, who maxed out his credit cards to get the documentary made, “Hollywood’s Magical Island” takes viewers on a first-time journey through its unparalleled history – beginning in 1919, when self-made chewing-gum magnet William Wrigley, Jr., purchased a portion of the island sight-unseen in 1919, then bought up the rest for \$2 million soon after arriving.

Among those featured on-camera are:

- **William Wrigley, Jr.’s granddaughter**, Ada Wrigley Schreiner, in her first-ever interview.
- Actor **Gregory Harrison** – a third-generation islander and son of the captain of the famous Glassbottom Boat that ferried tourists around Avalon Bay.
- **Tony Dow** – one of our favorite childhood stars as Wally Cleaver on the classic series, “Leave it to Beaver” – who spent every summer there with his family.
- Oscar-nominated actress **Kathleen Quinlan**, who was born in Avalon and returned each summer.
- The late **Les Brown** in his last interview, talking about playing the famed Catalina Ballroom with his Band of Renown orchestra.
- Fitness guru **Jack LaLanne**, who frequently visited during his body-building years.
- Oceanographer and explorer **Jean-Michel Cousteau**, an admirer of how well the island has been preserved.
- Surf guitar legend **Dick Dale**.
- Veteran film producer **A. C. Lyles**, who was working for Paramount Pictures when buffaloes were imported to Catalina for the filming of Zane Gray’s “The Vanishing American” in 1924, and shot many of his own pictures there.
- The late screen siren **Peggy Moran**, a cult favorite for her 1940 role in “The Mummy’s Hand,” who was a regular during the Big Band era.

“Hollywood’s Magical Island” takes viewers on an intimate journey through such history-making developments and moments as:

- The construction of the Sugarloaf Casino in 1920 – an eight-sided, steel-framed stucco structure designed to accommodate 250 couples at a cost \$250,000 – which later became the world’s largest birdcage.
- The discovery of the island’s real treasure in 1926, the clay deposits that were manufactured into the widely-known ‘Catalina tile,’ evident throughout Avalon.
- The design and construction of the island’s world-famous landmark, the 140-foot circular Catalina Casino, unveiled in 1929 at a cost of \$2 million – where, notably, gambling has never been allowed.
- The first theater ever built for “talkies” – which later became an acoustical model for Radio City Music Hall.
- The 15,000 square foot Avalon Casino Ballroom, where all the big band greats played to crowds of 6000 or more during the Golden Age of swing music.
- The stunning art deco-style murals by artist John Gabriel Beckman, a designer of Grauman's Chinese Theater a year earlier.
- The instrumental role that Catalina’s fleet of steamships played in transporting the hordes of tourists who visited from the mainland daily.
- The advent of amphibious seaplane service to the island, launched in 1919 by Charlie Chaplin’s half-brother in a failed venture.
- The 30-year history of Catalina as the spring training ground of the Chicago Cubs.
- The unlikelihood of Ronald Reagan’s being signed to an acting contract, as a result of covering the Cubs on Catalina as a Chicago radio announcer.
- Best-selling novelist Zane Gray’s famed fishing exploits as a member of the Catalina Tuna Club.
- The trend-setting fashion influence of the Catalina Swimsuit Company.
- The many death-defying contests that started up after 1927, including a cross-channel swim with a grand prize of \$25,000.
- Marilyn Monroe’s life as the wife of a serviceman stationed on the island during World War II – while she was still Norma Jean Baker.

About the Production

“Hollywood’s Magical Island” marks the directorial debut of Greg Reitman, who also wrote and co-produced the Blue Water Entertainment Production with well-known casting director Mike Fenton.

Reitman, now 33 years old, grew up outside New York City, and was headed to Emerson Film School when his father – owner of an executive search firm in the publishing industry – objected, insisting his son pick a more respectable profession.

So he enrolled in international studies, graduated from the University of Massachusetts, then spent a year working in the sales department of the trade division at Oxford University Press – followed by a year in England as the multi-media manager for Simon & Schuster International.

Ready for a new challenge, he moved to Australia and became a vice president of sales for META Group, selling information technology research to Fortune 500 companies. At the same time, he got his first hands-on experience in filmmaking from Tina Dalton, the award-winning wildlife documentary filmmaker whose work is frequently featured on the Discovery Channel and National Geographic.

It was enough to inspire Reitman to transfer to META Group's Los Angeles office, where he was put in charge of their Southern California operation. At the same time, he embarked on an intensive training program to learning filmmaking, A to Z. Besides reading every book published on the subject, he enrolled in UCLA's Extension certificate program – or which he attended classes five days a week for two years.

After graduating, Reitman started planning his exit from META. He had made a lot of money, put away as much as he could, and now just wanted to bury himself in celluloid.

As fate would have it, Reitman was on the verge of leaving META when he happened into a Malibu dive shop, where he saw a book on Catalina's indigenous underwater kelp forests. A scuba diver since college, he had explored the waters of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the Florida Keys, Hawaii and Israel, yet never seen anything like this unique natural wonder.

Intrigued, he hired a Harvard-educated researcher and paid her \$500 to tell him more. She returned two weeks later with a 10-page report that included the history of the island. "I said, 'Wow,' this is a fascinating place!" he recalls.

Buoyed by the fact that no one had ever captured Catalina's history on film before, Reitman resigned META, formed Blue Water Entertainment and visited Catalina for the first time.

Fortunately, he fell madly in love with the island the moment he saw it – because he would spend the next several years racking up \$50,000 in credit card debt, supplemented by a free Panavision package, film from Kodak and post-production services from Modern Video Film.

"Documentaries are wonderful, but you do not make a living making documentaries," Reitman says with a laugh.

Even so, he's hard at work on his next one.

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For more information, please contact:

Lyla Foggia
foggia public relations
(661) 259-6561

lyla@foggiapr.com