

Model citizen

Columbia grad student named 'Chicagoan of the Year' by Chicago Tribune

Tiffani Walker

Staff Writer

Just one year after founding the collaborative film organization Split Pillow, the Chicago Tribune has named Columbia grad student Jason Stephens "Chicagoan of the Year." The designation is no surprise, since Stephens' mission is to "discover, cultivate and keep talent in Chicago."

Split Pillow is a nonprofit film organization that uses experimental and collaborative techniques to create films that amplify the cultural art of Chicago.

"I grew up in Indiana and I always looked at Chicago as the cultural capitol," Stephens said. "I always knew I'd end up here someday. Chicago has great stories to tell."

Out of the millions of people who live in Chicago, what gives Stephens the credentials to be named "Chicagoan of the Year"? Since his company's inception in 2003, Stephens has produced two feature films. In doing so, he has provided a means for local talent to get their ideas out.

"He is the most inspiring person I ever met," said Jennifer Thornton, director of media relations for Split Pillow. "He's very creative, has drive and an eye for things Chicago needs."

Although city inspired numerous top box office movies such as *Chicago*, it's no secret that many of these films are being shot in Canada, where there are cost-efficient venues. Stephens said that if the city would provide opportunities and create an atmosphere that encourage artists to stay in Chicago, this wouldn't be necessary.

"Instead of going to Hollywood, we can create our own [films]," he said. "Artists can come here to do their work."

Stephens is currently working on introducing sixth graders—who typically dream of being police officers, firefighters or doctors—to filmmaking.

"Sixth graders are at the age where they are old enough to understand," he said. "They learn script, editing and the screening process. It's all media literacy, kids understand messages. They discover if they have a passion for media, or [maybe] it's something they'll never do again, but they can say it was fun. I want them to look at filmmaking as an art rather than entertainment."

While he plans to continue educating kids about film, Stephens has a busy year ahead. Stephens will develop a third collaborative feature under its Realization project, that will represent Chicago filmmaker Alexander Rojas's *Cushion* at the Slamdance Film Festival and host the third annual "The Challenge," a weekend filmmaking collaboration over Memorial Day weekend.

Theresa
Scarborough/The
Chronicle

Jason Stephens was named "Chicagoan of the Year" after founding Split Pillow, a nonprofit organization dedicated to aiding local filmmakers.

Webmaster: Aaron Vanderpoel

Copyright © 2004, Columbia Chronicle

Columbia Chronicle articles, photos, and graphics are the property of the Columbia Chronicle and may not be reproduced or published without written permission from the staff, editors, or faculty advisor. The Columbia Chronicle is a student produced publication of [Columbia College Chicago](#) and does not necessarily represent, in whole or in part, the views of [Columbia College](#) administrators, faculty or students.

Jan. 18, 2005

SEARCH THE ARCHIVES

[View the Archive Index](#)

WEEKLY FEATURES

School's out for ... never

This week in A&E

WHO SAID?

Jackass of the Week

Out of My Head

The Family Monster

TOP STORIES

Campus

City Beat

A&E

[Believe the hype](#)

[Indie rock rescue](#)

[Bad habits exposed](#)

[Bacon sizzles as 'The Woodsman'](#)

['Mona Lisa' smile cracks](#)

[Blockheads, burlesque and boobs](#)

[Model citizen](#)

[A 'Big Yellow Bus' ride to the playground](#)

Commentary

 **PRINT THIS STORY**

 **MAIL THIS STORY**