




Osseo Senior High alumni turned local filmmakers Matt Cici and David Marketon discuss a future film project while at the Uptown Theatre in Minneapolis.





# Lights. Camera. Action.

Sure, the Hollywood lifestyle of fame and fortune would be nice. But these homegrown independent filmmakers are just happy to make ends, and dreams, meet.

## A Lambent Leap

“Fun” is what first attracted Matt Cici and David Marketon to filmmaking. Marketon, a 2003 Osseo Senior High graduate, and Cici’s older brother started making films for high school classes about 10 years ago. That’s what prompted Matt, three years younger, to make his film debut. “I was humiliated enough to work on a project with them,” he remembers. “It was kind of ridiculous—one of those videos you make for Spanish class.”

Two years after graduating from high school in 2006, Cici reunited with Marketon, who gushed about an idea he had for a movie. They met, discussed the characters and a basic storyline of *Lambent Fuse*, a film exploring the choices of several characters who have various mental conditions, such as kleptomania and depression. The original plan was to write the script in an attempt to sell it. But about six months into the project, they became too attached, and Cici decided to direct it.

After two and a half years of writing and a 15-day blur of shooting, Cici and Marketon are currently in the process of entering *Lambent Fuse* in film festivals in hopes of catching the eye of a distributor. No matter where their newest creation takes them, Cici and Marketon are convinced of one thing: this won’t be their last film. “It will make me more prepared for the next one,” Marketon says. “We probably didn’t do everything the right way. You build off that.”

One could argue that Cici and Marketon have built a lot already. Their filmmaking journey began at Osseo Senior High as nothing more than innocent fun. But something that started as a simple hobby has become more of an addiction—a mental condition worthy of a spot in their new film. “I thought I could actually try to do this more for fun, until later it turned serious,” Cici says. “I think it was in college when I decided I’d rather do something I love for the rest of my life—and maybe not make anything off of it—than go into a field where I can live successfully but not be doing what I love the most.”

BY BOBBY HART  
PHOTO BY MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG





## Film Credits

Read more about Maple Grove's homegrown filmmakers, including more details about their projects, by visiting their websites:

Alex Knudsen: [gantryproductions.com](http://gantryproductions.com)

J. Van Auken: [facebook.com/pages/Sanitarium](https://facebook.com/pages/Sanitarium) or [imdb.com/name/nm2955551/](http://imdb.com/name/nm2955551/)

David Marketon and Matt Cici: [lambentfuse.com](http://lambentfuse.com), [stolenarrowfilms.com](http://stolenarrowfilms.com)

ABOVE: *Lambent Fuse* director/co-writer Matt Cici (right) explains a frame to Zachary Nelson, the film's director of photography, at Cloggy's Tavern in St. Paul. RIGHT: Alex Knudsen (left) talks to Mark 7even and Soup of the hip-hop group Portable Payback (former members of Jurassic 5) while shooting a live show of theirs in L.A. Knudsen shot their premiere music video, "Relax." FAR RIGHT: Joe "J." Van Auken is the director and writer of *Sanitarium*, a feature film in the works with a budget in the millions.





LAMBERT FUSE PHOTO COURTESY OF STOLEN ARROW FILMS LLC; KNUDSEN PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWNA DROP; VAN AUKEN PHOTO COURTESY OF ALICIA DIAMOND.

## A Beautiful Struggle

Alex Knudsen has written, directed, edited and acted in two feature films while living out in Los Angeles. He started his own independent film organization, and has even made a couple music videos. But he doesn't live in Beverly Hills, has never been interviewed on a red carpet, and hasn't had a problem dodging paparazzi. Knudsen, 36, has been working paycheck to paycheck for the past 13 years in L.A., currently making ends meet as a freelance cinematographer and editor in order to fuel his true passion: presenting his visions on screen.

Although he hasn't yet discovered the holy grail of glamour portrayed by the media as the Hollywood lifestyle, Knudsen has come a long way from his days working at Angeno's Pizza in Maple Grove and wearing a trench coat while chasing a ninja with a briefcase. *The Briefcase* was Knudsen's first scripted movie he made while attending North Hennepin Community College a year after graduating from Osseo Senior High in 1993. It was a labor of love, something Knudsen wanted to do for kicks, literally—his film partner just so happened to have a surplus of ninja gear. "So we were just like, 'Well,

let's make a movie about a ninja ... in the woods,'" recalls Knudsen. "It was a real thoughtout story, as you can tell."

Knudsen, who studied acting at the University of Southern California, says he truly transitioned from an actor to an independent filmmaker in 2006 when he formed his independent film organization, Gantry Productions. The following year, Knudsen started working on *Autopilot*, a two-hour feature with a cast of established Hollywood actors that stars Knudsen as a man released from a mental institution 16 years after accidentally being responsible for the death of his mother.

Two and a half years after premiering the film in L.A. and Minneapolis, Knudsen finally sold the movie to a distribution company last January. He looks at the fact that his film is now available on Blockbuster.com and Amazon.com as a victory, but also as a harsh reality of independent filmmaking. "Talk about struggle," he says, "it took two and a half years of sending it to film festivals and asking people to watch my movie."

A struggle? Sure. But Knudsen doesn't need to strain to recognize the beauty in it. "Even though it wasn't what I expected, it turned out to be much better," Knudsen says of moving to L.A. to pursue his dream. "It's the best thing I ever did in my life. It is what I do with my life."

## Varsity Turned Pro

In 2007, a young man nearing the end of his days at Maple Grove Senior High was told by a staff member to go pick up his varsity letters. This confused Joe "J." Van Auken, who had never played a varsity sport. But he had been watching them through a camera lens for the past four years as the "video guy" for Crimson football and basketball. "What nobody had told me was that technically qualified me as team manager," Van Auken recalls.

Four years later, Van Auken, 22, is in the process of directing his first feature film. *Sanitarium*, a psychological thriller Van Auken wrote about a man who becomes ill with a strain of tuberculosis while standing trial for murder in Minnesota, is tentatively scheduled to start shooting this spring and (according to the distribution contract) is due for a run in the theatres in 2012.

Although Van Auken is still in the process of making a name for himself, he's off to promising start. His film *1916*, a short war film he directed and wrote in 2009, was runner-up at the Take1 film festival in Chicago. Still, Van Auken sees *Sanitarium* as the beginning of his professional career. "In my little black Moleskin, I've got 20, 30 ideas I'd like to get out over the course of my career," he says. "And if I could just keep doing that, fine with me." //

▶ See the extended director's-cut version of this story at [maplegrovemag.com](http://maplegrovemag.com).