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Holiday Edition

*Host a
DIY
New Year's*

*Tips from the
TOY SHOP*



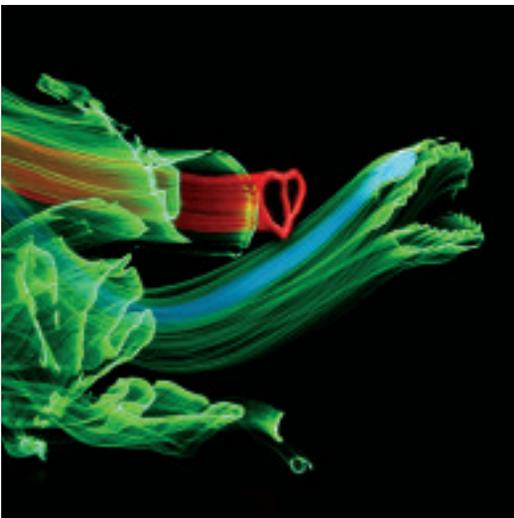


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A CHRISTMAS
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TURNNED *thriving* *into a* BUSINESS

BY RICHARD HUTTON

"YOU'RE gonna shoot your eye out, kid!"

Poor Ralphie Parker, all he wanted for Christmas was a Red Ryder BB Gun and everyone from his mom to his teacher and even a department store Santa at Higbee's thought it was a bad idea.

And so goes Ralphie's quest to lay his hands on the air-powered rifle in the now classic holiday film *A Christmas Story*, featuring scenes filmed in St. Catharines.

But for Port Colborne natives Tyler and Jordie Schwartz, the 1983 film classic has become more than simple holiday fare. It has become an obsession for the pair that rivals only Ralphie's desire for that elusive BB gun.

"We think that it should be com-

memorated. Here's this little modest movie made on a shoe-string budget," Tyler says.

This husband and wife team

has turned their love for the movie into a thriving business — and it all started with that leg lamp.

A symbol that is as iconic as the BB Gun — spoiler alert, Ralphie does get his hands on the Red Ryder and yes, he nearly DOES nearly

put an eye out — the lamp was *The Old Man's* (Darren McGavin) "Major Award."

And Tyler wanted one — badly!

"They didn't sell them in Canada," he says.

It was on a road trip to the Christmas Story Museum in Cleveland housed in the home used for exterior shots of Ralphie's home in the movie, that something serendipitous happened.

After taking up their plight with the museum, the couple wound up with Canadian distribution rights for the lamps.

"That's where it all started, with a leg lamp," Jordie says.

What "it" is, is RetroFestive, an online store — www.retrofestive.ca — and a bricks and mortar warehouse located in Oakville dedicated to what

the couple describes as "Canada's Pop Culture Christmas Store," selling memorabilia from a number of movies and television Christmas specials, including the aforementioned Christmas Story as well as National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, A Charlie Brown Christmas and even Star Wars. Boba Fett with a gift-wrapped Han Solo frozen in carbonite anyone?

But the current big seller is genuine moose mugs, like those used by Chevy Chase and Randy Quaid in a scene from Christmas vacation.

"Everybody wants them," Jordie says.

But closest to the couple's heart is A Christmas Story with film locations in St. Catharines, Toronto and Cleveland. The couple was inspired to film a documentary — Road Trip For Ralphie — about their search for all things A Christmas Story. In their travels the couple found costumes, locations and even the blackboard from Ralphie's classroom at James Madison School, actually Victoria Public School in St. Catharines.

"We started daydreaming what might be in that school," Tyler says.

Prior to Gillian's Place gutting the interior of the school to convert it to a women's shelter, the couple managed to get inside and were able to salvage the blackboard as well as the door to the classroom. Both were donated to the museum in Cleveland.

But the Schwartz's have hung on to one piece of movie history that strikes a personal chord with them. They were able to obtain the winter coat worn by Ralphie's friend Schwartz in the movie.

"He's our namesake," Tyler says.

That road trip also uncovered the exact spot where Raphie's little brother, Randy, swaddled in a snow-suit that left him unable to move, fell and literally couldn't get up. Anytime you drive down Russell Avenue in St. Catharines, stop and pay homage out

front of No. 152 and one can almost hear Randy's squeal: "Ralphie, I can't get up!"

But most elusive to them was just where the Chinese restaurant where Ralphie and his family wind up spending Christmas. They of course, with the help of Toronto's film location office, found the establishment, now a restaurant specializing in French cuisine.

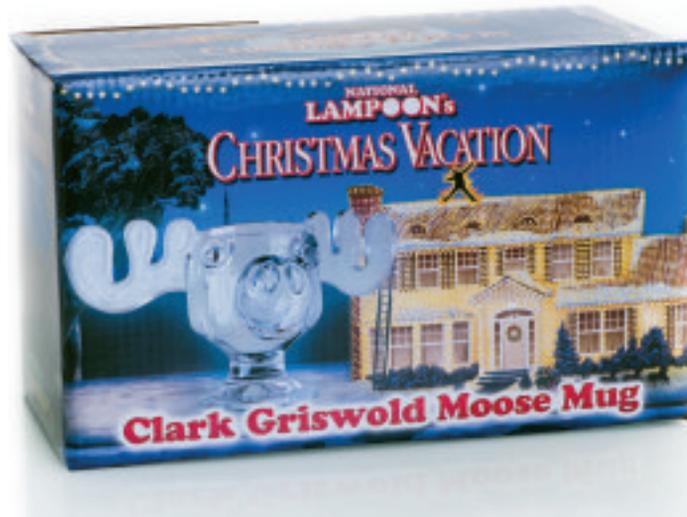
The couple is still firmly connected to their Niagara roots — their families are still here.

They have fond memories of the holiday season growing up, whether it be taking in the annual Christmas display at the Port Colborne Marine Heritage Museum or volunteering with the Winter Festival of Lights in Niagara Falls, something which both Tyler and Jordie did.

As for their business, the duo got a boost when they appeared on CBC



Tyler and Jordie Schwartz toast the season with holiday Moose Mugs made popular in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation.



Left: Moose mugs, as seen in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation are a popular item available at through Retrofestive.ca. Right: Rest assured, this Star Wars Imperial Stormtrooper will crack nuts better than the Rebel Alliance.

Television's Dragon's Den accompanied by an antique fire truck from Chippawa that was used in A Christmas Story.

They didn't score a deal but the Schwartzs were thrilled with the

exposure. To top things off, the show's resident Grinch, Kevin O'Leary made a deal of his own on the side — he bought a leg lamp.

"It was really, really neat," says Tyler.

From a business standpoint, they have

found their niche.

"Christmas never goes out of style," Tyler says.

More information can be found at retrofestive.ca. **nlife**