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EXCEPTIONAL MINDS

For Immediate Release

Sage Advice from Jamie Lee Curtis to the Exceptional Minds Graduating Class of 2015



Sherman Oaks, California – June 6, 2015 – Jamie Lee Curtis shared some valuable industry advice with the young visual effects artists at yesterday's open house held at the Exceptional Minds vocational school for young adults with autism in Sherman Oaks.

"Just pretend you're going for a job with, oh I know, Jim Cameron at his visual effects studio," she said, referring to the movie industry icon and reminding the seven – all in their 20s and on the autism spectrum – to aim high.

Just two days away from graduation, the seven young artists posing with Jamie Lee Curtis for pictures could have been any one of the thousands of young adults graduating from schools and universities this

month. Except these young adults who happen to be on the spectrum were taking their first bold steps into the competitive field of visual effects as the center of attention at yesterday's open house, where they rolled out the vfx carpet for about 100 industry professionals.

About-to-be Exceptional Minds graduates Nicky Benoist, Lauren Kato, Shane McKaskle, David Miles, Jeremy Pollock, Erik Prothero, and Mason Taylor expressed their desires on what type of work they would love to do.

They join 2014 Exceptional Minds graduates, who wowed everyone with their visual effects skills in roto and cleanup, green screen keying, simple compositing, object removal, tracking mark removal, and end credit work for a dozen movies and/or projects, including "American Hustle," "Dawn of the Planet of the Apes," and more recently, "Avengers: Age of Ultron."

"I will tell you what they have that other people don't have: (their) obsessiveness over detail," said Marvel Studios' Executive VP of Visual Effects and Post Production Victoria Alonso, who worked closely with Exceptional Minds visual effects artists on "Avengers: Age of Ultron" and was honored by the school for her company's support during yesterday's open house.

The "Ed Asner Award" was presented to Victoria Alonso by Jamie Lee Curtis. "This wonderful school that is going to give that group of kids an opportunity to live their dreams with dignity and purpose ... only works if there are companies that are going to support these graduates. And today we honor one such company that is going to receive some gratitude from this community for the community they've allowed us into," said Curtis, who presented the award to Alonso. Curtis is the author of best-selling children's books and is well-known for her starring roles in "Freaky Friday," "True Lies," "Trading Places," and "A Fish Called Wanda."

Marvel Studios is the second recipient of the "Ed Asner Award," which is presented to the school's most "exceptional" supporters in honor of Ed Asner, who is an autism advocate and the school's most notable founding advisor. Stargate Studios was presented with the award in 2014.

There was plenty of appreciation to go around at yesterday's industry open house, the school's fourth open house since it opened its doors in 2011. Exceptional Minds VFX Executive Producer and Job Developer Susan Zwerman thanked the industry's studios and visual effects facilities for the opportunities given its students in the past four years. She specifically thanked Marvel Studios, 20th Century Fox, RKO Pictures, Lionsgate, HBO, Stereo D, Pixel Magic, Stargate Studios, Engine Room, Method Studios, Encore Hollywood, United Front Design, Sesame Workshop, Profectum, and Dr. Ben & Company for their support.

In closing, the seven graduating students spoke of their experiences and their opportunities going forward...and their appreciation for the industry and their school. "Thank you to Exceptional Minds for giving me the skills necessary to do this, to start off my career," said 2015 Exceptional Minds graduate Nicky Benoist, who will be starting his new job as visual effects artist with Mr. Wolf studios in Culver City the day after graduation.

Many Exceptional Minds graduates go on to work in the Exceptional Minds Studio (EMS), which provides visual effects and other digital animation work on a project basis. EMS recently announced an expansion into a new 1,100-square-foot studio facility co-located in the same building as Exceptional Minds in order to meet the demand for rotoscoping, paint work, roto for comp, simple composites, visual effects cleanup work, end title work, and animation.

More than 3.5 million Americans are living with an autism spectrum disorder, with one in 68 children now being diagnosed (up from one in 88 just two years ago); more than 500,000 U.S. children impacted by the disorder will enter adulthood during this decade. Autism services cost U.S. citizens over \$200 billion each year.

Exceptional Minds is a pioneer in providing vocational training in the fields of animation and visual effects and a model for other vocational programs.

About Exceptional Minds (<http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org>):

Exceptional Minds is a non-profit vocational center and working production studio for young adults on the autism spectrum. It was chartered in 2011 to provide the training necessary for creatively gifted individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) who may not otherwise be able to make the transition from high school to careers. Exceptional Minds offers technical proficiency and work readiness training that prepares students for careers in graphic arts, animation, web design, visual effects and rotoscoping. Located in Sherman Oaks, California, Exceptional Minds is both an instructional learning facility and a working studio with hands-on student involvement in production projects, many for the film industry.

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Photo caption: Jamie Lee Curtis, left, and the Exceptional Minds graduating class of 2015 Nicky Benoist, Jeremy Pollock, David Miles, Mason Taylor, Erik Prothero, Shane McKaskle and Lauren Kato, with Exceptional Minds Program Director Ernie Merlan kneeling.