

tech reporter

Chris Marlowe



## DTS subtitling system can translate cultures

Subtitles are an essential part of the story in "Universal Signs." Rather than merely translate what the actors are saying, they give viewers an intimate window into a unique subculture by using the latest captioning technology.

Producer Catherine Miller says the movie is about a man whose life is nearly destroyed by a tragedy for which he feels responsible — because his deafness meant he could not hear the screams of a drowning child. The story is told primarily using American Sign Language, with captions for those who don't know it, accompanied by an interpretive score composed for a small orchestra.

"All of the shots are framed so the deaf can watch it in their native language, which has never been done before, while hearing audiences will be able to witness the beauty of a visual language," Miller says. "Deafness is not a disability, it is a minority subculture. The captions are just like when you go to a foreign film. You're seeing this new and different story, but at the same time it's human and universal."



"Universal Signs"

Miller says the project wouldn't have been feasible without DTS' Cinema Subtitling System technology. "We wanted to make it as accessible to as many people as possible," she says. "And to be honest, as an independent filmmaker, as cheaply as possible."

Captioning directly onto the print is expensive, she says, and getting those few prints to theaters is a task few exhibitors are willing to undertake for a niche audience. Those with DTS-CSS installed can project subtitles by putting a disc in the player.

"If theaters get DTS' open captioning technology, they will never have to get a special print again," she says. "That saves them money and benefits everybody, making it possible for members of the deaf community to participate in the experience of seeing a first-run film at a theater."

Integrating the subtitles even further into the "Signs" story, they disappear completely if the character can't see the ASL speaker.

If the character in "Signs" is deaf, so is the actor portraying that person. Margot Kidder recently joined a cast that includes Anthony Natale, a leading actor in the deaf community, known for his roles in "7th Heaven," "Jerry Maguire" and "Mr. Holland's Opus"; Lupe Ontiveros ("Selena," "The Goonies"), who has two deaf sons and does a lot of advocacy work; and Sabrina Lloyd ("Numbers," "Ed"), who learned sign language for the film.

Director Ann Calamia was inspired to write the script by a movie screening that included an ASL interpreter provided by the Philadelphia-based Creative Access organization.

"(Calamia) realized how the communication that goes on in the deaf community is a whole subculture she knows nothing about and set out to research it," Miller says.

Susie Beiersdorf of DTS' Cinema Products division says that DTS-CSS subtitles are on a CD-ROM that the player synchronizes with the timecode on the film and displays on the screen. The discs containing the captions are linked by a serial number to an individual print, just as the DTS soundtrack discs are, making it impossible for a theater to play the wrong disc.

DTS also makes the Rear Window Captioning System, which feeds closed captions to an LED display on the back wall of the theater. Viewers use portable reflectors to read them so others in the audience can't see the words.

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## SAG board changes course, will settle with Hessinger

### Agrees to pay a portion of contract

By Jesse Hiestand



Hessinger

The union's refusal to pay severance after firing him in the fall, sources said Tuesday.

The board, which had been pursuing a legal strategy that it was not obligated to honor Hessinger's contract, authorized the settlement at a meeting Saturday

by agreeing to pay some but not all of the \$1.6 million that was owed on the remaining 3½ years of Hessinger's four-year contract. Sources said the amount was about \$500,000.

SAG spokesman Seth Oster would not confirm the settlement but said the union would have a formal statement when the agreement is finalized.

"The guild hopes to settle this matter in a mutually amicable way and is currently working to do that," Oster said.

Hessinger was not available for comment.

The settlement defuses a potentially ugly and protracted conflict as Hessinger, who had

See **SAG** on page 44

## EchoStar chief Neuman exits

By Georg Szalai

NEW YORK — In a Valentine's Day breakup surprise, satellite TV giant EchoStar Communications said Tuesday in a regulatory filing that Michael Neuman has resigned as president and chief operating officer, effective Monday, after only about eight months on the job.

The filing did not provide a reason for the departure, and a company spokesman declined comment.

Once a corporate highflier in

Canada, Neuman took the president and chief operating officer job in June, with chairman and CEO Charles Ergen signaling then that he would take a somewhat reduced public role and leave day-to-day operations to Neuman.

Neuman's duties will be See **NEUMAN** on page 44



Neuman

## DirecTV extends BellSouth pact

By Georg Szalai

NEW YORK — Satellite TV giant DirecTV Group and telephone firm BellSouth Corp. on Tuesday extended an exclusive marketing alliance by five years without providing financial details.

The deal comes at a time when DirecTV investors are looking for See **DIRECTV** on page 44

## Jakubowicz follows Uni 'Protocol'

By Borys Kit

Universal Pictures has hired Jonathan Jakubowicz to write and direct the big-screen



Jakubowicz

adaptation of Robert Ludlum's "The Sigma Protocol." Paul L. Sandberg is producing.

"Protocol" centers on an American economist who See **JAKUBOWICZ** on page 44