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“Pixar Is Its People”

New film takes viewers inside the animation company that made going to work fun.

The success of Pixar Animation Studios goes far beyond its revolutionary approach to film animation, its slew of awards, or its uncanny knack for rolling out box-office hits like *Toy Story*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles* and *Cars*. What really drives the Emeryville-based company is its corporate culture: an environment of collaboration that emphasizes joy and creativity.

After all, these people make animated movies for a living. Why shouldn't their work be fun?

That's the essence of *The Pixar Story*, a new documentary by Oscar-nominated filmmaker Leslie Iwerks that premieres this month on the Starz premium cable channel. Featuring never-before-seen footage from the Pixar library, plus interviews with many of the key players behind the computer animation giant (including co-founders John Lasseter, Ed Catmull and Steve Jobs), it's an inside look at the people who forever changed animated films. And that's the ticket – as Lasseter notes in the documentary, beyond all their achievements in 3-D animation, “Pixar is its people. Our philosophy is that an office is an empty canvas [where everyone can create and play], and that's why it's so fun.”

To illustrate the point, the documentary takes viewers behind the scenes of both the creative process at Pixar – from Lasseter and other directors acting out storyboards, to computer animators struggling to find the right expression for characters such as *Nemo* and his dad – as well as the everyday work environment, where a production meeting is likely to break out into an impromptu battle of Nerf dart guns or an epic paper-airplane-flying competition. It's an attitude of “work plus play can still equal productivity” that continues to be emulated in offices across the country.

Lasseter's love of animation is evident throughout the documentary, but so is his commitment to creating good stories and strong characters. For all its computer-generated wizardry, *Toy Story*, the animated feature that put Pixar on the map in 1995 after earning \$350 million, never would have succeeded had the characters not resonated with the audience. Woody (the toy cowboy voiced by Tom Hanks in the movie) may be a child's plaything, but the displacement he feels at the arrival of hip new toy Buzz Lightyear (voice of Tim Allen) is something anyone can relate to. That basic formula – giving lifelike attributes to otherwise inanimate objects – also plays a huge part in the Pixar success story.

The Pixar Story premieres Tuesday, Apr. 22 at 10pm ET and PT on Starz and repeats throughout April and May. Check your cable or satellite listings or go to www.starz.com for additional airings. Pixar's latest release, *WALL-E*, hits theaters this summer.