

Sandy Hunter and Clem McIntosh

SPLIT SCREEN

Careers in television, theatre, and film sent Carleton County natives Sandy Hunter and Clem McIntosh on divergent paths. Now, back home, the business partners aim to transform New Brunswick into a Picture Province.

By Mark Rickard

Film producers Sandy Hunter and Clem McIntosh might have equal doses of potato soil and pixels in their veins.

The social fabric created around the St. John River Valley's gravelly, sandy loam, one of North America's most fertile earths, helped attract the sons of two farming families back to the province. However, the opportunity to help cultivate New Brunswick's stagnant film production into a hub of creativity and video creation is what will keep the owners of Cazador Inc. and Cultivation Pictures here for the long term.

"We want to help make New Brunswick grow and achieve its potential. It's not just us, there is whole community of people working on this right now and we want to be a part of it. It can happen and it will happen. We are staking our careers on it," Hunter said.

McIntosh agrees.

"I can see the potential... We could be at the forefront of something great if things go our way," McIntosh said. "We need everybody to believe in it as well."

Hunter and McIntosh certainly believe. In 2021, the business partners formed Cultivation Pictures in Florenceville-Bristol, a tribute to their farming roots, while Hunter opened Cazador Inc. in Fredericton. Both are working together, using their noteworthy film, television production and marketing skills, to produce content that will find audiences in New Brunswick, Canada and around the globe.

The duo has the industry credentials to back up their ambitions. Hunter graduated from Ottawa's Carleton University School of Journalism and started his career as a film magazine writer in Toronto. He worked in producing and content positions with Alliance Atlantis and Res Media Group and was co-founder of the Toronto production company Soft Citizen. He moved to Apple in 2009 and became head of Apple TV in Canada, working with national and international streamers, broadcasters, producers, and distributors.



Clem McIntosh, left, and Sandy Hunter on the set of Justus, a pitch for a comedic television series about locals fighting back against a property crime spree. McIntosh and Hunter formed Cultivation Pictures, based in Florenceville-Bristol, after moving back to New Brunswick. (Submitted photo)

McIntosh's fascination with film sprouted from weekend family excursions to Presque Isle, Maine, to watching movies and developing films in the family darkroom. Well-known drama teacher Weldon Matthews nurtured his love of acting on the Carleton North Theatre stage. He studied theatre school at Bishop's University and found himself chasing acting jobs in New York City.

"I took an alternate path from most actors, also working on movies on a crew capacity," he said. "I shot video for Time Magazine for a while, directing and acting in my own short form projects."

The acting blossomed into roles in *Accused* (Paramount+), *Nurses* (Global TV), *Master of None* (Netflix), *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO), *The Path* (Hulu), *The Lottery* (Lifetime), and *Broad City* (Comedy Central) at the same time as McIntosh became an accomplished director, cinematographer, and producer.

Friendly but scrappy

"When Clem and I started talking about this in 2020, we could see the potential, the stories to be told. We clearly recognize the unique culture of New Brunswick. New Brunswickers are friendly but scrappy, we're not necessarily that smiling Maritime Gee-Whillikers stereotype... We've got a bit more of an edge, which makes for great story opportunities," Hunter said.

So far, the duo has been busy producing 2024's *Backyard History*, a historical factual series detailing the Maritimes based on Andrew MacLean's popular newspaper and online articles, and 2023's *Wabanaki Modern*, an art documentary produced for the Beaverbrook Gallery and the CBC.

There's more in the works. Cultivation is pitching numerous television concepts, like *Justus*, a pilot for a comedic television series based in 'Russet County.' Residents take matters into their own hands when thieves steal a snowmobile and burn a

pickup truck, a not-so-subtle nod towards the property crime spree that affected northern Carleton County.

Other series ideas include *Dislodged*, a comedy and drama based on a struggling Miramichi salmon lodge. A corporate takeover highlights a struggle between tradition and change, a balance between what fishing was and what the sport has become.

Crustaceous is a sci-fi horror flick set in a forbidding seaside town plagued by mutant lobster cultists bent on global destruction. The world's only hope lies in the hands of a deadbeat hero who is focused on collecting his paycheque and coming home to a few cans of beer.

Meanwhile, Cazador has recently produced 2025's *What We Dreamed of Then*, a feature-length film set to release on Crave, in collaboration with Saint John-based Hemmings Films and Halifax's Brass Door Production. The film is the story of a passionate swim coach and dedicated father who is forced to navigate the turbulent reality of invisible homelessness.

Another recent Cazador venture is *Car Wash Wars*, a comedic collaboration with Steven Suntres, the Saint John writer and producer behind Paratactic Pictures, available on the Bell Fibe TV network and app.

The series pits an underdog and her inherited car wash company against the tyranny of big business. McIntosh plays a one-eyed gangster named Gull who drives the quintessential New Brunswick car, a green Bricklin.

The case for a vibrant industry

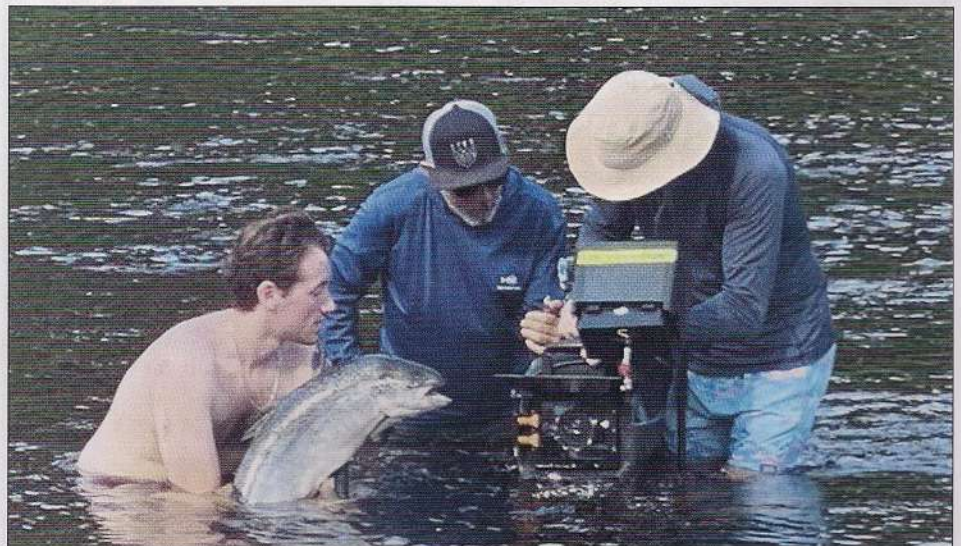
McIntosh and Hunter agree getting a successful film and production industry off the ground in New Brunswick is an uphill battle. Many other jurisdictions compete for lucrative television and feature film shoots, and New Brunswick is at the bottom of the pile when it comes to supporting the film industry.

"We're still waiting to hear what our new government is proposing for New Brunswick. It's a huge piece of what the province will offer. You simply can't make anything in Canada (or nearly every other country) without some help from government," McIntosh said.

"In Canada, there isn't the same system as in the United States with large TV networks and big film studios. There wouldn't be a Canadian industry without government support, since being so close geographically and culturally with the US



*Sandy Hunter with paramedics on the set of *We Dreamed of Then*, a feature-length film set to release on Crave. Hunter's company Cazador Inc. produced the film with Saint John-based Hemmings Films and Halifax's Brass Door Production. (Submitted photo)*



*A prop salmon prepares for a scene in *Dislodged*, a Cultivation Pictures comedy and drama based on a struggling Miramichi salmon lodge (Submitted photo)*



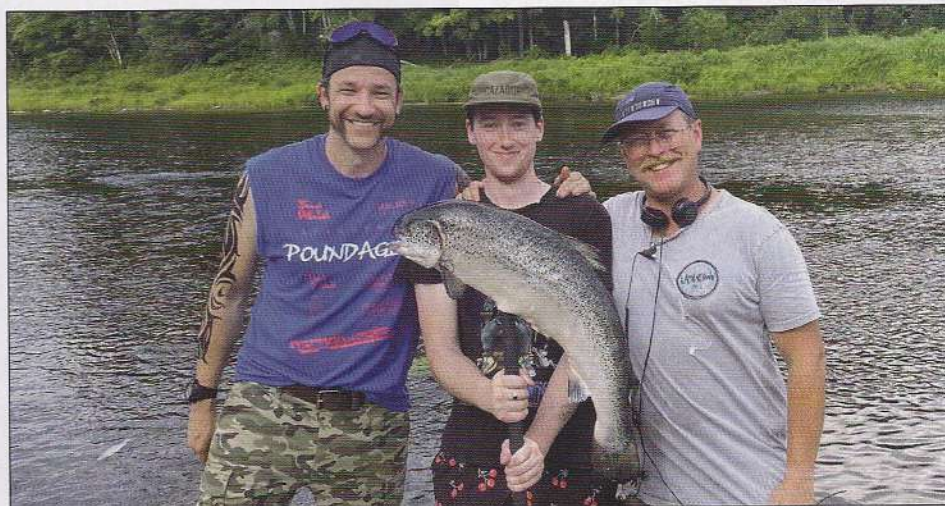
*Clem McIntosh behind the handlebars of a borrowed snowmobile in the Cultivation Pictures trailer for *Justus*. McIntosh plays brawler turned farmer Seaghan Allan bent on justice after someone burns his truck and steals his snowmobile. (Submitted photo)*

we are inundated with American television, and Netflix, and all of the other media coming from the US. I think it's essential for government, both provincial and federal, to provide some support... New Brunswick in particular has fallen behind, but it is coming back in a big way," Hunter explained.

The partners praised New Brunswick Tourism, Heritage and Culture department staff for working hard with independent producers to reinvigorate the local film and television industry. Still, they pointed out that even tiny Prince Edward Island provides more financial support.

"Every state in America has funding in the form of grants or a tax break or some incentive. Everyone wants these productions to come to their region because of the economic benefits. Studies indicate every \$1 spent by government agency courting films reaps as much as \$8 in benefits," Hunter said.

Media New Brunswick, the industry association for film and TV professionals, hopes a level playing field will see the local film industry become a thriving venture like Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Our Atlantic neighbours have beautiful locations and lots of local talent, just



Cultivation Pictures owners on location for the proposed television series Dislodged, a comedy and drama based on a struggling Miramichi salmon lodge. From left to right are Clem McIntosh, Xavier Johnson, production assistant with the prop fish, and Sandy Hunter (Submitted photo)

like New Brunswick, but doubled down on incentives to encourage more work. Productions filmed in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland receive the same 30 per cent rebate on costs. Still, New Brunswick has a minimal budget available to encourage a thriving industry.

Recent Nova Scotia productions include *We Were Liars* (Amazon), *The Institute* (MGM+), *Sullivan's Crossing* (Fremantle), *Sharp Corner* (Feature), *Little Lorraine* (Feature), *Christmas Island* (MOW, Hallmark), *Diggstown* (CBC), *The Secret Gift of Christmas* (Hallmark), *The Curse of Oak Island* (History Channel), *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* (CBC), and *Trailer Park Boys* (Netflix).

McIntosh, a union actor, said he has few opportunities in New Brunswick.

"I have to travel outside New Brunswick quite a bit. I have a management team in the states, so I will do quite a bit of

work down there, as well as an agency in Toronto. Everyone is self-taping auditions now. If I book it, I fly to that city to shoot it."

McIntosh said United States production companies look for the best financial deal when scouting potential Canadian locations.

Hunter pointed to the achievement of one Newfoundland TV series, the *Republic of Doyle*, as propelling a successful film and TV production industry in that province long after it stopped filming.

"Look at Alan Hawco (star of *Republic of Doyle*). Many people learned their trade and became professional camera people, sound people, makeup people; all of the production people required to make a series or film, because of him and that show. They are still reaping the rewards of that investment."

Subsequent Newfoundland television hits like *Son of a Critch*, *Hudson and Rex*, *Rock-Solid Builds* and *Saint Pierre* all built on that success.

"Film production could put New Brunswick on the map. I've noticed that people don't know anything about New Brunswick. People drive through it to go Nova Scotia," McIntosh said. "We need a strong New Brunswick identity. Look at *Anne of Green Gables* in Prince Edward Island, people come from all over the world to see PEI. You can accomplish the same (for New Brunswick) through film and television."

The pull of the Maritimes

Being at the forefront of telling great New Brunswick stories is a dream come





Clem McIntosh sets up a camera on the set of *Justus* located in fictitious Russet County, New Brunswick. (Submitted photo)



Clem McIntosh behind the camera during a recent shoot. (Submitted photo)

true for Hunter and McIntosh, who know they are far from martyrs for the local film industry.

"Personally, I always wanted to come back to New Brunswick. I never intended to stay in Ontario as long as I did," Hunter said. "I was producing and began working for Apple's film and TV business for what I thought would be five years and ended up as 12. But I would always come back every Christmas and each summer, sometimes for up to a month. My family is here, and I have always felt a connection to this place. I think most New Brunswickers and Maritimers feel this pull to come home."

When the pandemic hit, McIntosh left the Big Apple's bright lights to return to the family farm.

"My family is here as well, I grew up on a large farm, and living in New York City for 15 years, I missed it. I think coming back during the pandemic and having that pause and living on the farm while everything was shut down got me back to my roots and I realized how important that is to me."

McIntosh and Hunter are determined that New Brunswick can be the focus of a major film & TV renaissance.

"We have been actively producing in the province now for four years, and we've met so many talented creative individuals working towards this same goal. Many like us have come back here and brought their skills and experience with them, and yes, some other professionals have moved here for the first time," Hunter said. "So the talent is here. If we get a big yes from a broadcaster, I'm sure the province will back us and find a way to make it happen."

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