

Harley Nefe

Feature 1

A blue screen comes on. A piece of the tune “When You Wish Upon a Star” is playing. A castle begins to emerge, following with pixie dust spreading across the screen just before the film starts — a Walt Disney Pictures film.

For some people, like former Walt Disney World cast member Grayson Hamilton, the name Disney sparks memories from childhood.

“I grew up watching Disney movies and TV shows, and many of my toys and room decorations were Disney,” Hamilton said. “I’ve always been prone to escapism, and Disney provided a great way for me to partake in that.”

The Walt Disney Co. is one of the world’s leading producers and providers of entertainment and information. The company and its productions are prominent in society and can influence individuals in various generations, including the college atmosphere.

As a film major hoping to double-major in marine biology, Hamilton said one of her greatest influences is the film “Finding Nemo.”

““Finding Nemo”” was a great way to inspire further education and conservation of sea-life,” Hamilton said.

Hamilton along with other individuals finds inspiration for future aspirations through the Walt Disney Co.

“Disney has created this subculture of those who love and live life according to ideas of always believing in magic and that you can always have hope,” former Walt Disney World cast

member Amber Carder said. “You can learn to love anything you’re doing from the shows and movies created by Disney. The company has inspired people to keep dreaming.”

Films are not the only type of productions that can influence people. The Walt Disney Co. released a final chapter to an action role-playing game called “Kingdom Hearts III” Jan. 25. “Kingdom Hearts” is a video game series that merges the Disney universe with that of a Japanese science fictional game called “Final Fantasy.”

Graduate student Darius McClain began playing the “Kingdom Hearts” series in 2003, after seeing commercials for the game.

In “Kingdom Hearts” there are anime-like characters from “Final Fantasy,” and Goofy and Donald are also present.

“It was the unbelievability of it,” McClain said. “How do you throw that together? I had to find out.”

Junior Noah Bailey started playing the “Kingdom Hearts” games around the year 2008, after being introduced to the series by his brother.

“With Disney, there is always one movie that you grew up with, and “Kingdom Hearts” incorporates a vast majority of the films,” Bailey said. “Disney is a part of who I am as a person because it has been with me for so long. Seeing characters that you know you like already is reassuring in a game.”

You are as involved in the Disney world as much as you can be, allowing you to see things from different perspectives. For example, in the “Monsters Inc.” world, your character turns into a monster, or in the “Toy Story” portion, you become an action figure, Bailey said.

“Kingdom Hearts” tends to showcase specific themes of each Disney movie incorporated, as well as including its own values in the game.

While developing the main character's story, you encounter other characters and help them with their situations. By doing so, you mature and learn lessons with the characters, which is also beneficial to yourself, Bailey said.

"For example, Jack Skellington realizes there is more to life than just scaring people, and you also learn to face your own fears of certain things," Bailey said. "There's a mutual gain with helping people."

The film "The Little Mermaid" is also featured in "Kingdom Hearts," and the message is about finding a balance between developing independence, but not leaving everything you know and love behind or discounting where you come from, Bailey said.

App State alumnus Conor Mize has also been playing the "Kingdom Hearts" games since 2008, as the games provide an opportunity to continue his Disney fandom.

"Kingdom Hearts" really strongly promotes this message of friendship and building bonds between people," Mize said. "Even if they are from different worlds, they can be friends and are given the strength to overcome all obstacles by turning to other people for help."

Apart from emphasizing the power of friendship and family, "Kingdom Hearts" also shows what happens when you isolate yourself. There are the conflicts of good versus evil and giving in to temptations involved. It is more complex and not just black and white. The characters are not necessarily good or bad, which is relatable to the real world, Mize said.

The Walt Disney Co. influences its audience by a variety of productions, whether it is seen through films or video games.

"The things Disney puts in its productions tries to make people more open-minded, loving and accepting of everyone in our society, and we always need more of that," former Walt Disney World cast member Julia Callbeck said.