

Life through a lens

Peter Ralley has the ultimate career combining the two loves of his life — photography and education. Here, he talks to Staffordshire Life features writer **KAREN COX**

THE success of TV programmes showing home movie clips has proved how much we all love recording those special little family moments for posterity.

What's more, the technology is now readily available for everyone who has ever fancied becoming the next Hitchcock or Tarantino to make their own films.

But making a digital movie effectively and successfully is another matter, one which ex-headteacher Peter Ralley knows all about.

Peter, who lives in Alrewas, has managed to combine his two professional passions of photography and education into the ultimate career for him — teaching children and adults how to make films and animations on courses which he runs both in the UK and France.

Peter was a professional photographer for many years working in a variety of different areas from running a studio to press photography, before entering the world of education, which proved to be a huge success for him. Within five years he had achieved the position of deputy head, two years later taking up the role of headteacher at Thomas Barnes Primary School in Hopwas.

He remained a headteacher for 11 years before leaving to go into business with Paul Cockcroft, who is also a former head teacher with their company LCA Digital.

Peter used his love of photography throughout his teaching career and encouraged the use of photography and film as a creative medium. Now he sees the work he is doing as the ideal way to use his skills as a photographer and trainer for the benefit of schools, business and other organisations.

“My role as a headteacher was great and I really enjoyed it but I felt like there was something else for me to be doing.

“In the last nine months I have worked in over 100 schools in 15



Peter Ralley was a professional photographer for many years

different local authorities, teaching 2,500 children instead of 80.

“I feel like I’m making more of a difference now than pushing paper as I don’t have all of the bureaucracy.”

Paul added: “I spend a lot of time in schools, but I had an idea to teach in other places.”

One of the ‘other places’ is part of a short break in Castleton, Derbyshire, where people can learn all about the different aspects of digital photography, although Peter is keen to point out the

courses aren’t designed for those who want to become professional film makers, more for those who want to make their own home movies a bit more interesting or as a starting point to go on and learn more.

Peter is also about to launch his film making courses in France and so far has courses organised in two places, at Carcassonne and Nice and a third venue in the Dordogne is also interested.

“As far as I can tell this is a unique



Pictures: JON THORNE

concept," he said. "There are numerous painting and photography courses but this is something new.

"Lots of families seem to be looking at different types of holidays these days and I thought this was something which seemed approachable."

The first course to be held will be the French houseparty at Carcassonne in South West France during the school half term from October 27-31 and a second course a week later on the French Riviera at Maison des Arts, Saint Jeannet, near Nice which is booked for November 2-9. He is also taking bookings for the courses in France next year.

The courses in France are fully inclusive, comprising accommodation and meals as well as five days' tuition and all the equipment needed.

Peter offers the chance for people to learn how to plan using a storyboard for their digital film, understand and handle camcorders, panning and zooming, using a tripod, lighting, sound, how to shoot on location, creative ideas and tips.

Those who participate will also learn how to edit on the computer, trimming,

moving clips, use of stills, transitions, putting a rough cut together, use of effects, overlaying clips, adding music and titles and the final cut as well as file types, presenting and uploading to the web. You will also spend time filming and there will be a grand showing of everyone's digital movies at the end.

No previous experience is necessary and Peter says it is something the whole family can enjoy, aged from eight to 80.

"I have made films on an amateur basis for years, always making daft little films with my family. I have always been interested in it and now it is far more accessible to people," Peter said.

He added they hope to be able to deliver training to everyone in a nice venue and hope to train people how to use equipment which is easily available to all from local high street electrical stores.

Peter regularly makes films for competitions and he has recently made a film with a grant from Awards for All which was based on the history of the Trent and Mersey Canal in conjunction with Graham Sellors who is a retired

ITV children's programme producer and wrote the script for the film.

A number of local teenagers were also drafted in to help with the production which was well received and has proved very successful, already selling 120 copies.

The film was shown at the recent Arewas Film Festival which was launched three years ago by Peter and his wife Paula Dumolo in order to encourage local people to get involved with film making. So far they have received on average 25 films to be shown each year.

Teaching and inspiring the next generation of film makers is something which Peter is genuinely passionate about and he firmly believes everyone can learn to do

"There are people who think that they can't do it, but after a few hours they realise that they can — people can succeed and achieve doing this — everybody who comes along will be able to make a film and for many it's a starting point for them to go onto film festivals or film making."

For more information call 01283 790054 or 07792 075855 or visit www.lcadigital.co.uk