

'The Adventure Lovers'

Johnsons documentary to be ready for release by November

Tom Wilmoth

Tribune writer

In the three months since Michel Viotte and his French film crew visited Chanute, their documentary on Martin and Osa Johnson has gone from a project in the works to a film with a name: "The Adventure Lovers."

By November, it will be ready for release.

"They have one of the most incredible stories of the movie industry," Viotte said of the Johnsons. "They were incredible artists."

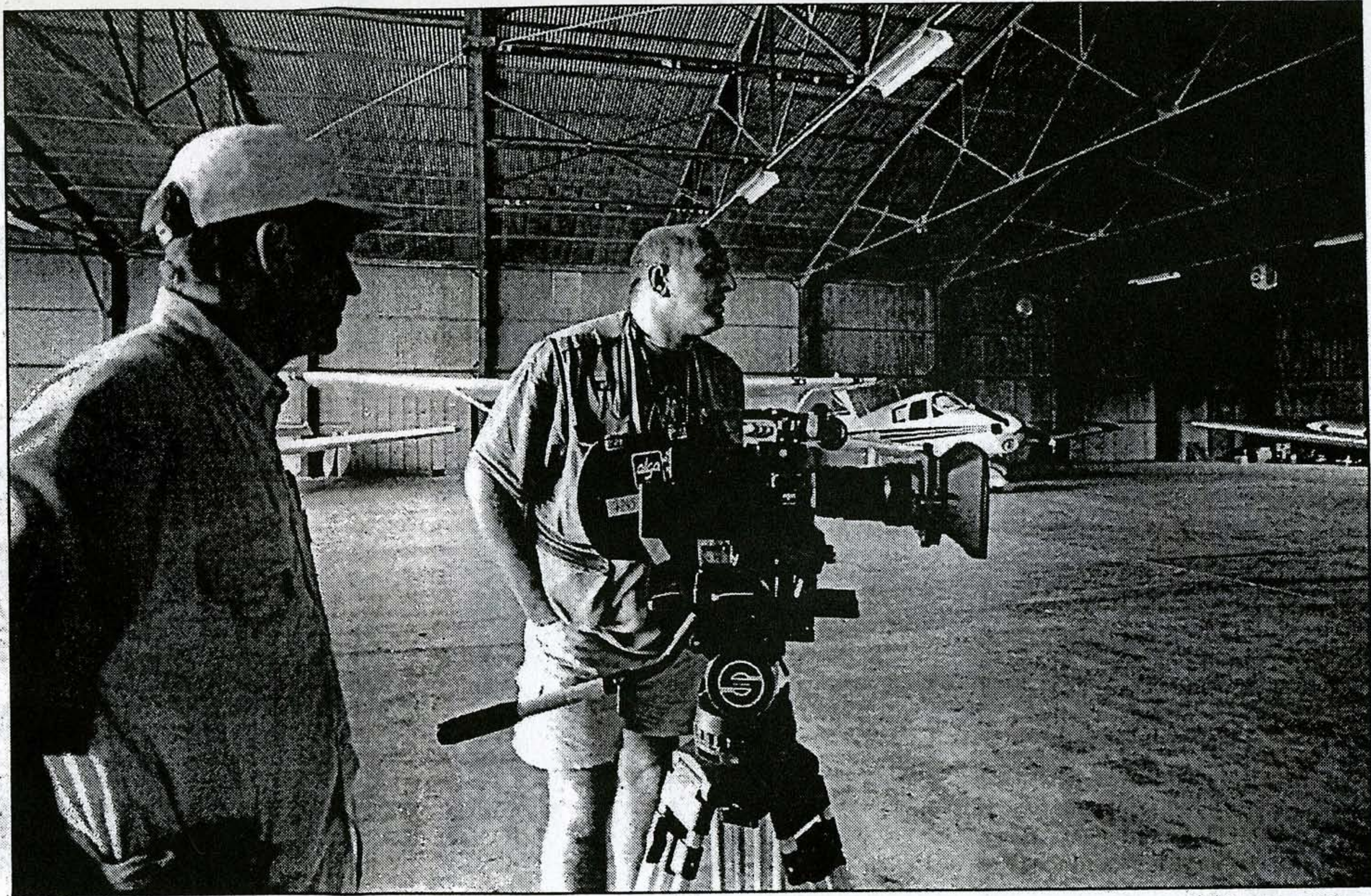
Viotte visited Chanute back in April, going through archives at the Martin and Osa Johnson Safari Museum, and videotaping pictures for the documentary. He came back with a full film crew this week and a 16mm camera to film footage — visiting the airport, museum and cemetery where the Johnsons are buried.

The crew started in New York City, visiting the American Museum of Natural History, and will return there for more shots after leaving Chanute. A two-week trip to Kenya is also planned in September that will provide safaritime shots for the documentary.

Viotte said a normal documentary for French television runs 52 minutes, but the Johnson film will run an hour and a half.

"We think the Johnsons deserve that," Viotte said.

The documentary has been five years in the making. Viotte said they first discovered the story of the Johnsons while working on a project on Jack London several years ago. That led to convincing French television to fund a film on the Johnsons.



Joel, cameraman, and Michel Viotte, director, shoot footage at the Martin Johnson Airport for a documentary film on the lives of Martin and Osa Johnson. Rob Morgan/Tribune

The documentary is scheduled to run on French and German television in mid-December. Viotte said versions in several languages, including Spanish, English and German, will be produced for distribution.

He expects the film to be made available for showing here in Chanute as well.

Editing of the film has already begun and will take five months. In between, Viotte is also working with a writer on the script. Viotte wrote the first version and since then the writer has written two more. Final writing will take

place when the film editing process is complete.

When Viotte looks back, he is amazed at the turn the project has taken since he first learned of the Johnsons back in 1995.

The documentary will be the first project exclusively covering the Johnsons' lives to be shown for a national audience. Viotte was first captivated by the cinematography of Johnson, in light of the danger he faced.

Native Kansans, the Johnsons traveled the world for two decades, chronicling their explorations with both pictures and in

books. They are best remembered for their movies and books about the wildlife and people of Africa, Borneo and the South Seas.

The importance of their work includes not only what they chronicled, but also their foresight to take pictures of themselves during their adventures, allowing the entire story of their adventures to be told.

The legacy left by the Johnsons began in Kansas, advancing to some of the most remote areas of the world. Their record included some of the earliest and best quality images of east Africa and

other regions, making it of great value to researchers.

Viotte says there "is a richness" to the Johnsons' story and the documentary will include "the incredible images (they captured on film) that people have not seen for years."

Viotte has appreciated the help of the Safari Museum staff and has been impressed with the museum's archives.

"I've done a lot of films with archives — but I've never seen so many incredible archives (as they have here). They have real treasures," he said.