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This is part of an occasional series by the Sanpete Country Travel and Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance on the people and places along U.S. Highway 89.

### **'Big Daddy Roth' Movie Premieres at Toronto International Film Festival**

The world premiere of *Tales of the Rat Fink*, a documentary/drama about the late Ed Roth, a Sanpete County resident, was held this week at the Toronto International Film Festival. Roth was famous for designing and building hotrod cars and for creating 1960s cartoon characters. He died in Manti in 2001 at the age of 69.

The movie was directed by Canadian filmmaker Ron Mann and stars John Goodman as Big Daddy Roth. It's a combination biography/cultural commentary on Roth. Goodman narrates the film from heaven, playing Roth as he looks down on Earth with fond memories. The film also includes the voices of Jay Leno, the Smothers Brothers, Matt Groening and Paul Lemat. The real Ed Roth is included in the film in archival footage and new interviews.

"I am so happy to have a movie that will preserve Ed's legacy," Ilene Roth, Ed Roth's widow and the Sanpete County auditor, has said about the film. Both she and her late husband met with Mann in 2000 when he came to Utah to discuss the movie. She said her husband was very excited about having a movie produced to spotlight his creations with Rat Fink and fiberglass cars.

The film opened in Toronto Sept. 15 to positive reviews. Hotrod Hotline called the movie "A multimedia laughfest, not only gives the viewer a look into the very fertile mind and imagination of Ed Roth, but is also a window into the '50's and '60's that brings back memories of those times much like 'American Graffiti' did. If it comes to your area, don't miss it."

*Tales of the Rat Fink* is being theatrically released by the indie film distributor Abramorama. Following the film festival in Toronto, the movie will open in New York, Boston, Detroit, Chicago and Austin, eventually making its way to Utah. An avid hotrod enthusiast from the age of 12, Ed Roth started out by fixing up old cars in his garage. He then moved on to building cars from scratch and quickly became known as an artist rather than a mechanic, with his creations earning the title "sculptures on wheels."

He built one new hot rod per year during his prime, and gave them names like the Outlaw, Beatnik Bandit and the Surfite. He financed his passion by making cartoons and T-shirts, including drawings of cars and monsters driving cars. His most famous cartoon character was a rodent named Rat Fink, which became very popular in the 1960s and was featured on posters, T-shirts, rings and more.



Every year, Ilene Roth holds a "Rat Fink Reunion" celebration to honor the life of her late husband. The weekend attracts hundreds of his fans from around the world. One of the reunion's special events is an open house at the "museum" Ilene Roth built on to her house to showcase Ed Roth's creations. His art work is framed and hanging on the walls, and other memorabilia is on display. The museum is open to the public year-round by appointment.

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