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SEPTEMBER 2006

Magazine

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Facing the Giants

By Jim Kumorek

Reaching the world from Albany, Georgia



Alex Kendrick has a passion for the visual media — videos, movies, and the process of taking an idea from a blank piece of paper all the way to the screen. In fact, one of his goals early in his adult life was to one day create Christian movies. So, like any person wanting to break into the film-making business, he packed up his belongings and moved to ... Albany, Georgia?

You may have heard of the upcoming movie being released at the end of September entitled *Facing the Giants*. What you may not be aware of is that *Facing the Giants* was produced by a church in (that's right) Albany, Georgia, and is the faith-child of Pastor of Media Alex Kendrick and the staff and congregation of Sherwood Baptist Church.

In 1999 Alex Kendrick took a staff position at Sherwood, but not without some hesitation, for his heart's desire was to pursue filmmaking. In fact, he tried to convince the church that he really wasn't the right person for the job, stating "One of my dreams and hopes is to shoot full-length Christian feature films one day". Yet the church remained convinced that Alex was the man God was bringing forth to them, and convinced him to join the staff. Alex's role as associate pastor of media includes delivering content for one of the local cable

Photo (left): **Cinematographer Bob Scott used his Panasonic VariCam AJ-HDC27 with a Mini35 adapter and Panavision lenses to achieve film-like results with a digital video camera.**

Photo (right): **The movie *Facing the Giants*, being released on September 29, 2006, was produced by Sherwood Baptist Church of Albany, Georgia, on a budget of \$100,000. Over 500 volunteers from the church participated in the production of the movie as cast, crew, or production support.**

Photos in this article courtesy of Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Georgia.



Photo (above): **Facing the Giants** is the story of a high school football coach (left) with a losing team and few things in his life going well, until he chooses to approach life by pleasing God first.

Photo (left): **Diffusion screens** provide even light coverage from the intense 12K fixture, and a camera dolly on a dolly track provides smooth camera movement through scenes.

TV channels. The church produces several programs themselves, and has won awards for some of their short videos.

After Alex settled into his new position, he happened to read a quote from George Barna, who stated that television and movies are more influential in our society than churches. Alex took that quote to Senior Pastor Michael Catt, and said, "Let's try doing a feature length production". Pastor Catt was supportive of the idea, and gave Alex the go-ahead to write a script and give it a try. But there was one catch — there was no money in the budget for such a venture. "You'll have to pray [the funds] in," stated Catt.

Their first production is entitled *Flywheel*, the story of a dishonest used-car salesman who turns his life around. This two-hour movie was shot with one Canon XL1 digital video camera with a

P+S Technik Mini35 image converter, which provides a more film-like result by significantly reducing the depth of field and softening the image. The entire budget for the movie was \$20,000, and done entirely with volunteer actors and crew from the church using local homes and buildings as the set.

On completion, the local Carmike cinema was approached about the use of one of their theaters for showing the film for a weekend. The theater was skeptical, yet agreed to the proposal and a 50/50 split of the receipts. Local publicity resulted in the opening weekend being so well attended that the theater kept extending the movie — running for six weeks with a total of 4,200 tickets sold. The community was clamoring for a DVD version they could buy, and so the church provided one — selling 1,000 in one day.

Blockbuster video and Netflix learned of the movie and chose to carry it. At final count, the church sold 36,000 DVDs of *Flywheel*, and received notes from over 2,000 people who either gave their lives to Christ, or rededicated their lives and businesses to Christ.

Following the unprecedented response to the production, Alex said, "We need to keep doing this — and the next one I want to shoot in high definition." And thus *Facing the Giants* was born — the story of a high school football coach facing innumerable challenges both on and off the field. By this time, Alex's brother, Stephen Kendrick, had joined the staff at Sherwood Baptist, also with a passion for film and media. Alex and Stephen co-wrote the script for *Facing the Giants*.

A goal of the second production was to up the production quality, producing a

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movie that could be transferred to film for showing in multiple local theaters. Realizing that taking the production quality to this level would require equipment and expertise beyond their in-house ability, fundraising quickly became a priority.

And fundraising happened — church members and local businesses donated \$100,000 to make *Facing the Giants* a reality. This enabled the rental of audio, video and lighting equipment, plus funded bringing in several film production experts from the Orlando, Florida area.

Veteran sports cinematographer Bob Scott was brought in to shoot the movie, due to his experience with shooting sporting events. Scott's Panasonic VariCam AJ-HDC27 was utilized with a Mini35 adapter and Panavision lenses. The VariCam provides the ability to shoot at variable frame rates, from 4 fps (frames-per-second) through 60 fps, which enabled capturing the movie at the normal film frame rate of 24 fps.

For audio, Sennheiser lapel mics and a boom mic were utilized, with Rob Whitehurst, a sound recordist/mixer based in Tampa, Florida, supervising. Whitehurst set up the boom mic with a wireless transmitter, eliminating the need to run a cable from the mic to the camera.

To provide adequate lighting, a selection of Arri HMI lights were used, the largest being a 12K (12,000 watts of illumination). Several kinoflow full-spectrum fluorescent fixtures were also used. To even out the illumination, diffusion screens were employed. Keith Slade, currently at the Film School of Florida State University, oversaw the lighting.

The pros from Orlando performed a technical production "boot camp", training

church volunteers to be grips, camera-men, makeup artists — the works. They then supervised production, with church volunteers making up the remainder of the crew. As with *Fly Wheel*, local homes and facilities were used for the sets.

About 500 of the church's 3,000 person membership volunteered in one way or another. Sunday school classes prepared meals for the cast and crew throughout their six-week shoot. One team of volunteers laundered and ironed the cast's clothing so it would be fresh and ready for the next day's shoot. Local high school football teams were the teams in the games. The entire shoot took six weeks, working 12 to 15 hour days.

One of the challenges they faced was shooting a full-length movie with only one camera. Multiple camera angles in a scene can only be achieved by shooting the same scene numerous times from different angles. This can be challenging enough with normal scenes, but this is a football-based story. To shoot the games from multiple angles, the teams had to repeat the exact same play over and over again, in the same way, to obtain the multiple angles.

On completion of the shoot, a Panasonic DVCPRO HD deck was used for ingest into the Apple G5 dual-processor Mac for editing — consuming 1.5 terabytes of disk space. Editing was done with Apple's Final Cut Pro.

During editing, the Kendricks wanted to make use of the song "Come Together" by the Christian recording artists Third Day. Stephen approached Provident Music Group for permission to use the music, who initially was inclined to refuse permission for what sounded like a low-quality production. But Provi-

dent agreed to view the movie before delivering their decision, and the church shipped them a DVD.

The first person to view the DVD was an assistant, who immediately called Provident's president and said, "You need to watch this". The president agreed to give it 10 minutes. He gave it 120, and then called in his staff to watch.

Unbeknownst to the Kendricks, Provident had recently been acquired by Sony, and Provident's president called the president of Sony Pictures and told him that "they had something Sony needs to see." Sony had been looking for Christian films to produce, and subsequently offered to distribute *Facing the Giants* nationally, putting it in 400 theaters to see how it does.

Which brings us to today. *Facing the Giants* opens in theaters around the country on September 29, 2006. It's a story of faith overcoming adversity; of God working through his people; of his people responding to God's lead through ever increasing faith and trust. And it's told by the people who know it best — a local church, whose faith overcame challenges, where God worked through his people, and whose people responded.

Jim Kumorek is the managing editor of Church Production and Worship Facilities magazines.

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— END —



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