

FIRCREST ENTERTAINMENT

Fireshoe Productions blazing new trails in film business

Current project sees exclusive preview screening this month; two more movies in works

by **Holly Smith Peterson**
Contributing Writer

It's difficult enough to just break into the film business. And even more challenging to do so in just a single niche of screenwriting, acting or producing.

Yet, as an audience of more than 500 filled Edmonds Center for the Arts for the preview screening of the World War II-themed "The Last Rescue" last week, a dynamic duo that has headed Fircrest-based Fireshoe Productions since 2007 knew they'd found something that resounded throughout the crowd of exclusive guests, actors and military members.

"People loved it. It was fantastic and they were cheering at the end," said screenwriter and producer Hallie Shepherd, who also had a major role in the film. "We had World War II veterans there, and it was great to hear them talk afterward about how much they enjoyed it, and that it really honored them and was an accurate representation of that time."

In "The Last Rescue," shortly after D-Day, three American soldiers and two Army Corps nurses stranded behind enemy lines take a high-ranking German officer as a prisoner as part of their escape.

we had to find the right space. It's important for the first time that we do it right."

Based on attendance and audience reaction, Shepherd and Colley can breathe easy on this one. The next step is for their movie and media partner Hybris AS to schedule worldwide public releases for "The Last Rescue" – dates will be available on the Fireside website.

And for the small company that has made giant strides in the film world since its beginnings as more of a promotional and marketing video company nearly eight years ago, there's much more in the works for 2015. Currently its principals have two scripts that they're looking to fund and film next year: a suspense thriller "Last Scene in Idaho," which will shoot in Tacoma, and a more traditional action suspense film. Both recently received the green light from distributors.

Shepherd and Colley agree, too, that distributor approval up-front is paramount before even starting the script, because it means that those companies can and will sell the idea. Working with distributors all throughout writing, editing and casting the film also provides logical budget and profit projections.

See **FIRESHOE**, page 8



PHOTO COURTESY OF FIRESHOE PRODUCTIONS

"The Last Rescue," by Fircrest's Fireshoe Productions, saw a successful screening in front of exclusive guests, actors and military members last week.

But Fireshoe producer and director Eric Colley said that bringing stories like this to life on-screen is more about having a smart business strategy than about just making a movie.

"We're always looking to see the opportunities we have on hand; in this case, we hooked up with people who had access to restored tanks, uniforms and military equipment," he said. "We wrote a script tailored to the resources we had available, and the budget that we had available."

Added Shepherd, "How we get our ideas starts with what the market is interested in and what our distributors think will be successful. Everyone loves World War II films because it's an interesting time in history, but also from business standpoint it's something that sells."

As the screenwriter, though, this time she emphasized bringing out both the male and female roles in the script.

"Women are always in secondary roles in war films, either at home getting letters or working in Red Cross hospitals far away from the action," she said. "The truth is that they were actually really in or very near the battles, so it was interesting to also tell their stories. That's something I wanted to do."

Colley is from Tenino and Shepherd also has regional roots, so Fireshoe is in Fircrest. They chose Edmonds venue for the premiere screening for its cutting-edge technology and investor proximity.

"Not many places have that state-of-the-art setup, and we wanted that. Also, a lot of our investors are in the King County area," Colley explained. "In addition, because it wasn't a public release,



Profile in Excellence

Heritage Bank has been the primary lender for my business and projects for more than 15 years. I have found them to be excellent to work with. They exemplify relationship banking.

—Sandy Desner

Heritage Customer:
F. Sandy Desner
Deskoba Inc.
360.352.4861

Business Banker:
Blake Lindskog
360.705.9182
Olympia

HERITAGE BANK
the quality business bank

Pictured L to R: Blake Lindskog with Sandy Desner

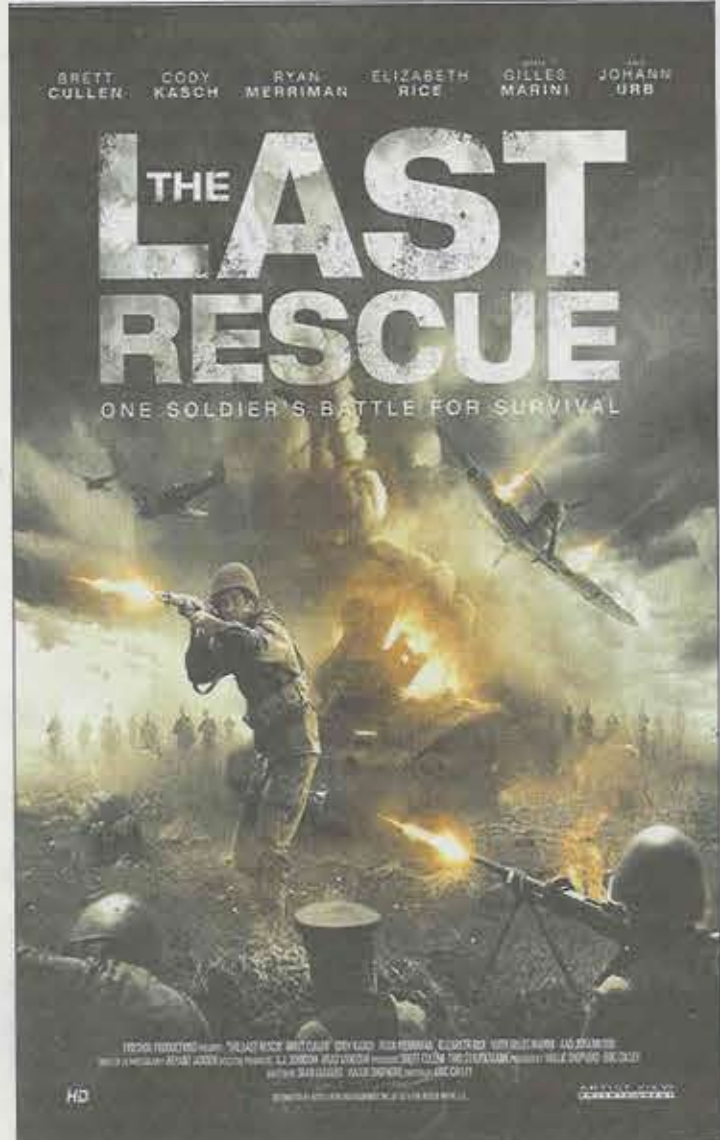


Serving the Pacific Northwest since 1927 | www.HeritageBankNW.com | 800.455.6126



FIRESHOE

continued from page 7



And that tweaks the investors' confidence, which then sparks funding to get the film made.

Another key strategy element is to be investor-oriented, they said; meaning to include investors as much as possible during the timeline as well, and to make sure the end result is to their benefit.

"We formulate our basic business plan on all of this," Colley said. "Our goals are to make money, then to entertain. You can't do one without the other; you can't make movies if you don't make a profit."

Said Shepherd, "What you want is something with high-quality content that moves your audience. It needs to have a message, and make people feel something. Then there's always the business side. These things sound so different, but they actually go hand-in-hand."

You can be sure, too, that as business partners both Shepherd and Colley will be wearing multiple hats while making each film. Shepherd said that it's actually easier than it appears to be both the screenwriter and an actress because she's already preparing for the role while she's writing it, as opposed to an actor who sees the script just two weeks before starting the on-camera work.

"It comes down to planning and organization in the pre-production, so that when I'm acting I can focus on that and let my team handle everything else," she said. "Eric is in the same boat as a producer and director because his focus when we're filming is on the shot. So in pre-production we rely so much on the organization, because then we can take on our other roles."

Colley's inspiration for his filmmaking career and creating Fireshoe stems back to his movie-making as a kid. Shepherd's motivation for her multifaceted career and starting the company was her passion for

storytelling, which began with writing and reading books as a youth, staging plays with her friends, and shooting homemade movies with a VHS camcorder. Later, when her interest hadn't waned, she switched to an English degree and embarked into theater pursuits her junior and senior years in college.

"Then, when I went into the real world, I said, 'This is what I want to do. And I will do whatever I need to do to make it happen,'" she said.

What's the most difficult part about running a production company? Said Colley, keeping everyone motivated and focused on the same goals.

"It's always the collective effort of managing people across various levels, and keeping the excitement and positive atmosphere over a long period of time," he said. "It's also a challenge to keep everything organized, and to keep everyone in the discussion. We take it one step at a time, but it's a long process."

As for the long hours, Shepherd said neither she nor Colley mind.

"We work a lot, but we don't mind because we love the process," she said. "Even in our downtime we're thinking about work; we might suggest going for a hike. But then, while we're hiking we'll be talking about one of our movies."

As for the caveats of becoming a filmmaker in any capacity, Colley said that the biggest mistake most people make is to just write something and then hope to sell it. Instead, see what the market wants, and if you can actually make that type of film; plus, how much it will cost, and whether you can raise that kind of money.

"From a business standpoint, the thing that we try to enlighten people on is that — when it's done correctly and with the right production company — it is possible to make a good film," he said.