

WE ARE MARSHALL

Based on true events, “We Are Marshall” tells the inspiring story of how a small town in West Virginia struggled to cope with a devastating loss and restore their community after one of the worst disasters in the history of American sports.

On the evening of Saturday, November 14, 1970, a chartered jet carrying Marshall University’s football team, coaches and fans, was on its way home from a hard-fought game in North Carolina. Less than a minute before its scheduled landing at Tri-State Airport, the plane crashed in the Appalachian Mountains, killing everyone aboard: 37 players, eight coaches and university staff, the flight crew, and 25 prominent Huntington citizens who had made the trip as they always did to cheer their “Thundering Herd.”

In the aftermath of this stunning tragedy, university president Donald Dedmon (DAVID STRATHAIRN) prepared to suspend the school’s football program for the season—perhaps indefinitely. Assistant coach Red Dawson (MATTHEW FOX), who narrowly missed the ill-fated flight, couldn’t face going back onto the field.

But in Huntington, Marshall football has always been more than a sport: it’s a way of life. And this town would rally to save it.

After some initial setbacks, they found hope and strength in the leadership of outsider Jack Lengyel (MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY), a young coach determined to rebuild Marshall’s football program and, in the process, help to heal the community.

Less than a year later, on September 18, 1971, Marshall University’s brand new Thundering Herd was poised to stage one of the greatest comebacks in collegiate sports. A raw, youthful and inexperienced squad, patched together under the guidance of Lengyel and Dawson, they would defy overwhelming odds just to march onto the gridiron for the school’s first game since the accident.

That season, it didn't matter whether Marshall won or lost. It didn't even matter how they played the game. All that mattered was that they *played*.

Warner Bros. Pictures presents, in association with Legendary Pictures, a Thunder Road Film/Wonderland Sound and Vision production of a McG Film, "We Are Marshall," starring Matthew McConaughey ("Failure to Launch"), Matthew Fox (ABC's "Lost"), Ian McShane (Golden Globe Award winner, "Deadwood"), Anthony Mackie ("Million Dollar Baby"), Kate Mara ("Brokeback Mountain"), January Jones ("The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada"), Brian Geraghty ("Jarhead") and David Strathairn (Oscar nominee, "Good Night, and Good Luck.").

"We Are Marshall" is directed by McG (the "Charlie's Angels" films), from a screenplay by Jamie Linden, story by Cory Helms & Jamie Linden. It is produced by Basil Iwanyk ("Firewall") and McG, with Brent O'Connor ("Scooby Doo 2"), Jeanne Allgood, Thomas Tull ("Superman Returns") and Scott Mednick ("Superman Returns") serving as executive producers.

The creative behind-the-scenes team includes director of photography Shane Hurlbut ("Drumline"), production designer Tom Meyer ("A Lot Like Love"), and editors Priscilla Nedd Friendly ("Stuart Little 2") and Gregg London. Music is by Emmy Award winner Christophe Beck ("Buffy the Vampire Slayer"). Costumes designed by Danny Glicker ("Transamerica"). Score album on Varese Sarabande CDs.

Rated PG for "emotional thematic material, a crash scene and mild language."

"We Are Marshall" will be distributed worldwide by Warner Bros. Pictures, a Warner Bros. Entertainment Company.

For more information, please visit www.wearemarshall-themovie.com

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Honoring the Past, Building the Future

“‘We Are Marshall’ isn’t about a plane crash, or the evolution of a football team; it’s about what happens to people who are handed a horrific loss and how they deal with it and recover,” says producer Basil Iwanyk. “The restoration of the team and the football program at Marshall, while true, becomes a metaphor for what’s happening in this small community where so many lives are inter-connected.”

Barely six months old when the Marshall accident occurred, Iwanyk never felt its headline-making impact and was only marginally aware of it as an adult, as part of sports history. “I knew about the crash but didn’t know what happened afterwards,” he says. While researching material for another potential sports-related project for his production company, Thunder Road, he uncovered reports about the Marshall crash. His interest was piqued by accounts of the heroic rebuilding efforts undertaken by the school and the Huntington community following the sudden loss of so many of their loved ones, and realized that’s where the real story was.

Discovering that the only film record of the event was a little-known 2000 West Virginia Public Television documentary, “Ashes to Glory,” Iwanyk says he felt strongly that, “This was a story begging to be told.”

Screenwriter Jamie Linden became involved through an indirect connection to Marshall’s assistant coach Red Dawson, who missed the fatal flight. Linden attended Florida State University, Dawson’s alma mater and the school where the Hall of Fame gridiron star first made a name for himself in the 1960s before becoming a coach. In 2000, on the 30-year anniversary of the plane crash, the FSU student newspaper ran a commemorative article on Dawson, which stirred Linden to delve deeper into the historic event.

“When I read the piece I was struck by the fact that I had never heard about what happened to the Marshall team,” says Linden. “I was born after the crash. People of my parents’ generation may remember it, but it seems to have fallen out of public consciousness since then.”

Director Joseph McGinty Nichol, who goes by the moniker McG (“Charlie’s Angels” and “Charlie’s Angels: Full Throttle”), had a similar emotional reaction to the story, which he was also hearing for the first time. “I’ve always been attracted to dramatic stories and this is one of

the most compelling I've ever come across. It's about survival and what's right with the human condition.”

The facts alone hold such natural poignancy and drama, and so many moments of honest inspiration that there was little need for embellishment. Says McG, “So much of what actually happened is so unbelievable that if it wasn't based on a true story you would assume it was pure Hollywood hyperbole.”

One perfect example, near the end of the film, is a climactic last-minute pass in a football game played by the newly formed Thundering Herd against rivals Xavier—only the second game of their comeback season in 1971. “The way that game ends is nothing short of amazing,” says Iwanyk. “It seems like a screenwriter's fantasy, but is, in fact, a faithful reenactment of that historic game. So many people in Huntington remember it, to this day, and for good reason.”

“We Are Marshall” has many such moments. As Linden acknowledges, the hardest part of preparing the script was deciding what to leave out. “We worked hard to tell as many stories as possible. This tragedy affected a whole town: a team, a school, a coaching staff, and their families, friends and neighbors. By far, my toughest challenge was accepting that there were so many individual details we had to omit. It actually kept me up nights. Editing is always hard, but, with this movie, it was particularly painful because it wasn't ‘material’ we were dealing with—it was real people, and each of their stories is worthy.”

The screenwriter offers a glimpse into the myriad unpredictable ways this one event touched so many Huntington families. “The team's equipment manager, John Hagan, was supposed to be on the plane but drove to Greenville instead, because the flight down was on Friday the 13th, and he was superstitious. Eddie Carter, home to attend his father's funeral, missed the game and the flight, which saved his life. The team's sophomore kicker, Marcelo Lajterman, had secretly married his girlfriend, Mary Ellen Cook, and was planning to announce the news at a party that Saturday night, but died on the flight before he had the chance.

“One of the most heartbreaking stories,” Linden continues, “was about two couples on the plane, friends who were godparents to each other's children. One couple had four children and the other, five. Including those nine kids, when that plane went down, a total of 18 children in that small town were orphaned. And there are so many stories like that. It was impossible to fit them all in, but I think the stories that we did tell do a good job of representing the whole. The sentiment is authentic and we had a lot of people on hand to keep it honest.”

Following the tragedy, there arose the question of whether or not to restore Marshall's decimated football program, with cogent and emotionally charged opinions on either side.

Says McG, "If we've done our job properly, audiences will understand the value of moving forward with the program and, at the same time, the reasons for *not* moving forward with it. They're both valid positions. I believe there's a natural spirit that takes over after a loss that makes some people want to get back in right away and do something positive—in this case, rebuild the team and play again. But if you look at it from the other side, you have to think that every time the sounds of a football game echoed down the main streets of Huntington, mothers would only be reminded of the sons they lost."

"Either way," offers Iwanyk, "it's impossible to pass judgment on any of these people."

"Life happens," says Matthew McConaughey, who stars as Coach Lengyel. "The choice then becomes how you deal with it, how you heal and move on. Everyone does it differently but the important thing is to take that first step. You may not be sure where your foot's going to land, but you still have to take that step. That's why this is such a powerful story; there is pain and loss, but then, just to get back onto that field, just to put your shoes on in the morning and go back to school or work is a way to start healing."

McConaughey drew on personal experience for one insightful comment he makes as Lengyel, in a scene where Dawson is questioning the sense of leading a losing team. Not a line from Linden's original script, it was a quote from McConaughey's friend, University of Texas' famed football coach Daryl K. Royal: "If you step out onto that field and lay it all out there, if you give it everything you've got, then we cannot lose. We may be behind on the scoreboard by the end of the game, but *we cannot be defeated.*"

As McG sees it, that comment, which represents McConaughey's own driving philosophy, "meshes perfectly with the theme of 'We Are Marshall.' It's a beautiful, life-affirming perspective, and the central idea of the film."

Each Person Copes in His Own Way: Casting Real-life Roles and Some Composites

Jack Lengyel was considered by many to be the right man at the right time.

Matthew McConaughey spent time with the former coach in preparation for portraying him, and describes Lengyel's formidable influence in Western movie terms. "He was the

outsider who rode in with his own plan; he was a little unorthodox, but it was an unorthodox situation. There isn't a how-to book for coaches who lose an entire team. What he did was get people to deal with reality and the present, step-by-step and play-by-play. He wasn't reaching for a good season but for a good day's practice, then a week, then maybe a month. His goal was just to take the field and they could worry about wins and losses later—and in the process, he inspired morale.”

McG feels it was Lengyel's outsider status that best served the situation, allowing him to be compassionate but detached, respectful of the communal grief but not immobilized by it. “As he wasn't personally connected to the crash, he had the freedom to focus on rebuilding.”

“I've been looking to play a great character like this for years—a teacher, a coach, a father,” says McConaughey. “To find a part like this, with a story so moving and exciting and uplifting, and then to know that it's not fiction, it was truly amazing. As soon as I finished the script I knew I wanted to be a part of it, and then almost immediately afterwards I got in touch with Jack Lengyel and immersed myself in the history, which I knew nothing about.”

Lengyel, who served as an advisor on the film, explains why he wanted the daunting coaching job. Watching the drama unfold in the news from his coaching post at The College of Wooster in Ohio, he felt, at the time, that the sport had afforded him a college coaching career and this was “an opportunity to pay back what football had given to me, to give something back by helping a school that really had some major problems. I felt I could help rebuild the football program.”

It is a heartfelt commitment McConaughey fully embraced in his portrayal. “One of the joys of watching Matthew in this role is how he brings such genuine passion to it,” says McG. “You understand that Lengyel was a guy who was thrilled to be on the fresh-cut grass, doing what he loved most. You feel that in every single take. Matthew was so immersed in this character, and so prepared, he showed up every day in that mindset and he captured the full spectrum—not only the philosophy and energy Lengyel brought to Marshall, but uniquely personal details like his bearing and delivery, his gait, his style of speaking and that high-spirited hand clap.”

Lengyel himself offered praise for McConaughey's interpretation, although he did take exception to one little element, saying, “I don't think my sideburns were *quite* that long.”

Matthew Fox, himself a former football star at Columbia University, takes on the role of Red Dawson, Lengyel's assistant coach during the rocky 1971 season following the crash, in which they had to recruit and train nearly an entire team of rookies. Dawson, only 27 at the time and with just three seasons of coaching experience, had narrowly missed the downed plane and was left not only with a profound sense of loss but a lingering case of survivor's guilt. Of the 37 players aboard, 20 were boys Dawson had personally recruited.

"Red has been carrying the weight of that night with him for 36 years, and thinking about the fact that he wasn't on that plane," says Fox. The actor developed a genuine rapport with Dawson, who served as an advisor during production and even took on a cameo role as a coach of Huntington rivals Morehead State. "I think that because of who he is, and the responsibility he took for those kids, it's been a very difficult thing to deal with and making this movie has brought up things I believe Red has tried to keep inside."

McG credits Fox for his ability, "to understand the power of stillness. That was something specific to the Red Dawson character and I wanted an actor who understood what it meant to stand tall, do something quietly and powerfully with his eyes, maybe just looking down the bridge of his nose and communicating something he cannot say."

In the film, Fox, as Dawson, offers a sentiment that is nearly verbatim what Dawson himself recently expressed: "I went to 20 houses, sat in 20 living rooms and promised 20 mothers that I would look after their sons. They would have been the class of '73. Twenty kids... and not one of them is left. Tell me, how am I supposed to look a mother in the eye and promise her anything again?"

At the same time, notes Fox, "Red feels an obligation to help rebuild the program and knows that Lengyel needs him and that, ultimately, takes precedence over his own personal feelings." Fox also factored in another element of Dawson's character, the part of him that never stopped loving the game. "Talking to Red," he says, "I got the sense that he was a very intense guy on the field and the game was very important to him. I've been away from it myself for a long time but I know that feeling."

Cast as Red Dawson's wife Carole is January Jones, who found the challenge of her role was to reconcile the conflicting emotions she believes Carole Dawson must have experienced: overwhelming joy for her husband's survival and compassion for friends who were not as lucky.

In a dramatic onscreen moment, Carole is shocked to see Red come home the night of the crash, having believed him to have perished with the others. Trying to imagine how that would feel, it was Jones' instinct, she says, to react physically. "If someone I loved had been taken from me and then miraculously returned I would just want to pound on him, to feel he was actually there. So you see me not speaking so much as hitting him, hugging him, making that intense connection to confirm that he's alive and he's in my arms."

Like Dawson, varsity player Nate Ruffin also missed the flight and suffered considerable survivor's guilt. Sidelined by a forearm injury, the 20-year-old defensive back had remained behind when his teammates flew to North Carolina.

Ruffin is played by Anthony Mackie, who believes it was partly this sense of guilt that fueled Ruffin's relentless energy on the field. "In a situation like that, it's natural to think 'those were my friends, my family, my teammates and I should have been with them. What makes me so lucky that I wasn't on that plane?' Dealing with that creates a lot of pressure, and Nate was one of those individuals who channeled that pressure into raising himself and his teammates to another level of performance. That was his survival skill and his therapy."

Nate Ruffin passed away in 2001, but his family and friends shared their memories of him with the film company, even inviting Mackie to spend Easter at their home in Huntington. "He was described by everyone as an old soul," the actor relates. "He was a wonderful, spirited person who loved to help people, kind of like the unofficial mayor of Huntington. People spoke of him with such love, and that was something I wanted to express."

At the time, not everyone in town was in favor of restoring the team. Some believed the community should take time out to heal and re-evaluate, some considered it a dishonor to those who died, and others were so consumed by grief that it just didn't matter. This mix of emotions is represented by the composite character Paul Griffen, played by Ian McShane as a widower who lost his only child in the crash and actively lobbies the university board of directors to suspend the football program.

"As much as Ian McShane is adept at playing villains," notes Jamie Linden, "Paul Griffen is definitely not a villain. There are a lot of people who went into forming that character and they are as sympathetic and heroic as anyone else in this story. When a tragedy like this occurs, people handle it differently. There isn't a right way or a wrong way to grieve."

The Griffen character is linked to another composite character, cheerleader Annie Cantrell, played by Kate Mara, who has her own genuine football connections. Mara is the great-granddaughter of NY Giants founder Timothy Mara, and Pittsburgh Steelers founder Art Rooney, and often sings the national anthem at Giants home games.

Annie Cantrell represents the experiences of many young women who lost friends or boyfriends in the crash—in Annie’s case, her fiancée, Chris, Paul Griffen’s son. Mara, who met with former Marshall cheerleaders during production to get their impressions of that night, tried to imagine the enormity of such a loss. “What would you do if you lost your fiancée in a plane crash? Imagine having your whole life planned out and it’s just ripped away from you,” she says. “I don’t think a person needs to have any interest in football to appreciate this story and be affected by it. It’s just so moving.”

Meanwhile, amidst the post-crash turmoil and debate over whether or not to proceed with the football program, as well as the practicalities of how to even accomplish such a thing, university president Dedmon continued to carry out his increasingly difficult duties.

David Strathairn, who stars as Donald Dedmon, found few newspaper accounts that mention the late university president, so expanded his research by talking with former school administrators and Huntington residents who knew him, and ultimately formed in his mind a picture of “a man who did his best and tried to put people before policy. It seems there were conflicting opinions about how popular he was at the time, but, in retrospect, Dedmon came to be lauded and highly respected for his involvement and his efforts.”

Adds McG, “We feel the fundamental goodness in every choice Dedmon makes.”

An outsider like Lengyel, Dedmon was an interim president and an academic with little knowledge of football. Yet, says Strathairn, “He became inextricably entwined in the lives of the community. During his brief tenure he had to make a decision about the future of football at this university and he chose a man whose heart seemed to be in the right place. It was Dedmon’s job to find a new coach and he came up with Jack Lengyel.”

Mirroring the sentiments of some of Huntington’s citizens hardest hit by the tragedy, Brian Geraghty brings to life another fictional composite, the character of varsity player Tom Bogdan. Like Nate Ruffin, Bogdan also missed the flight. But unlike Ruffin, who transforms his grief into a fierce dedication to the new team, Bogdan is overcome by his loss and guilt.

Says Geraghty, “Bogdan just doesn’t have it in him anymore. For him, it was more than football, it was a part of his life that he shared with these guys who had become his best friends and he just didn’t want to be out there on the field without them. It would never be the same.”

Aside from the very few original varsity players who remained, most of the 1971 squad were beginners, such as the Young Thundering Herd’s quarterback, Reggie Oliver, a real-life character played by Arlen Escarpeta. Oliver was a Marshall freshman who suddenly became one of the senior members of the team, as well as one of the first Black NCAA quarterbacks and a future Marshall Hall of Fame player. His pass to Terry Gardner in the final seconds of Marshall’s home game against Xavier in September of 1971, in a play that Coach Lengyel had never used before, propelled fans to their feet with cheers they hadn’t expressed in a long time.

“Reggie Oliver made the choice to stay,” says Escarpeta. “That meant he had to accept a whole new group of guys on their own merits as teammates and friends. That couldn’t have been easy, when every number and every position on the field reminds you of someone else.”

Escarpeta and Oliver met when Oliver visited the set to watch the re-enactment of the climactic play against Xavier, a scene that brought back vivid memories. “I was an 18-year-old kid from Tuscaloosa,” Oliver says. “I like to think we put some of the first bricks in the wall after the crash as Marshall rose from the ashes. It was a tough experience to be 18 and go from being one of the youngest players on the team to one of the oldest, almost in the blink of an eye.”

“Just Get It Right”

“People refer to ‘six degrees of separation,’ but in Huntington it’s more like one or two degrees,” says David Strathairn. “We met people everywhere who were connected in some way to these events, who may have lost a parent or a friend or knew someone who had been killed, and they were so forthcoming with their experiences and memories. There was a lot of sadness but moments of celebration too, and some excitement that this story, *their* story, was going to be told. It provided a kind of energy that we all felt.”

Dawson, who overcame some initial doubts to ultimately participate in bringing “We Are Marshall” to the screen, revealed this mix of emotions when facing the prospect of watching the completed film. “I’m really looking forward to it. But I think I’d better be by myself when I first watch it through; my emotions are still pretty strong.”

Many of those directly affected by the crash still live in Huntington and even now, more than three decades later, the impact and the aftermath of that night remain crystal clear. It's a memory they have protected a long time. As Matthew Fox observes, "When a community endures this kind of tragedy, along with the grief and pain people feel, I think there's a sense of ownership that develops around it and a concern about how outsiders might perceive it. That may have been somewhat of the reaction when Lengyel first arrived with his optimism and energy, and it would be the same when word got out that a movie was being made."

The filmmakers took an honest, sensitive and collaborative approach.

"When you find out who these people are and you understand how they endured and recovered, why in the world would you *not* want their cooperation and support, and their blessing?," asks Iwanyk. "We didn't want to let them down."

Iwanyk and McG met with Jack Lengyel and Red Dawson, and interviewed family members and former school administrators, making their presence known on campus and around town well ahead of production. They invited university representatives, plus Lengyel and other key participants, to preview the script prior to shooting.

"They didn't need our permission to make this movie, but they wanted it," confirms Dr. H. Keith Spears, a former Marshall student and contemporary of classmates lost in the crash. Now VP for Communications and Marketing at the University, he worked closely with Iwanyk and McG to coordinate production on campus. "People were in favor of having a movie made but their only concern was that 'they just get it right.' We had three essential parameters: first, honor those who died; second, respect the people of Huntington and the state of West Virginia; and third, help us guard the integrity of the university. Marshall was a great institution prior to the plane crash and it was a great institution after. It is not 'the university of the plane crash.'"

"It's a subject that still touches the heart of this community," adds Huntington native Keith Morehouse, who was nine years old when he lost his father Gene, the radio announcer who called all the Thundering Herd games and was on the plane with the team that night. Morehouse followed in his father's footsteps, entering the field of broadcasting, and has called Thundering Herd football and basketball games on television while serving as sports anchor for the local NBC television affiliate. He met his future wife, Deb Hagley, while the two attended Marshall University. During their courtship, Morehouse recognized her surname as that of team doctor Ray Hagley, who died on the plane with his wife, Shirley.

“After our initial conversations it was obvious to us that the filmmakers wanted the same things we did. They were serious,” says Spears. “Jamie’s script was on target and it portrayed our story in a manner that I think anyone who knows this legacy could recognize and appreciate. They were very open to us and we, in turn, put out the red carpet for them.”

As Lengyel recalls, “They asked if there were any concerns and, if so, how to address them, because they didn’t want to alienate anyone or cause any further hardship. I think the actors’ and crew’s sensitivity and understanding of the Marshall story captured the ‘BIG GREEN’ spirit of the university and the community.”

Perhaps nothing exemplified this more than an incident that occurred just prior to filming—the discovery of an anonymous, handwritten letter, addressed to the production and left at the memorial obelisk at Spring Hill Cemetery, an unmarked grave for six of the players whose bodies could not be identified. Written in the collective voice of those who died and referring to them as a family, it said, in part, “You guys have been given the challenge to tell my family’s story to the rest of the world. I charge everyone involved to put their very soul into this challenge. We may be gone from this earth, but we represent the hope of every son and daughter of Marshall University and, like hope, our spirit will never die.”

Upon receipt of this letter, Jamie Linden distributed copies to every member of the cast and crew, reinforcing their commitment and setting the tone for the entire production.

Local supporters turned out in great numbers for a huge block party the city hosted downtown to welcome the film company on April 1, 2006, complete with a stage raised outside the historic Keith Albee Theater where McG, Basil Iwanyk, Matthew McConaughey and David Strathairn thanked the 8,000-strong crowd and joined them in their signature battle cry—“WE ARE MARSHALL!”

“They shout it to the heavens,” observed Strathairn. “It’s how they introduce themselves to the world and it’s their acknowledgement that they have moved on successfully—survived, achieved and accomplished something from the ashes of that plane crash. It shows the spirit of the town and the community.

*Production Kicked Off at Marshall University Campus and
Other Authentic Huntington Locales*

Filming on “We Are Marshall” began where the story unfolded 36 years ago: at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, and in the city of Huntington itself.

Production designer Tom Meyer recalls that McG felt so strongly about the authentic locale, he didn’t want to proceed unless a significant portion of the film could be shot there. “When I first met with McG, we flew out there together. It’s true what people say, that there’s a certain feel to a place that you just cannot fully recreate on a soundstage.

“When we walked down the street,” Meyer continues, “people would approach us and say ‘I remember the night of the crash,’ many with a direct connection and real loss. Those emotions became instilled in us in a very powerful way, just as they did when we stood in front of the memorial obelisk at Spring Hill Cemetery. We spent the first three weeks filming in Huntington and by then I had been there half a dozen times. My designs were always altered by my experience there.”

Among the practical sites on campus that Meyer incorporated were the student center and the chapel, where townspeople congregated on the night of the crash. On the vacant third floor of a building being renovated he uncovered three arched windows that had been dry-walled over and created the boardroom for a scene in which Nate Ruffin challenges the university directors on their decision to suspend the football program.

The campus became a set and Marshall students, staff and administrators became extras.

Spears, who took the lead in coordinating filming around class schedules and events, recalls how, “As we began to bring the film crew into the Herd, making them part of Marshall University, they began to make us part of them as well. You could see this organizational dance taking place to make sure we didn’t hinder production and they didn’t stop classes. Campus security, faculty, parking, plant operations—we were all involved, whether they needed a higher voltage of electricity on the third floor of the Morrow Library or a place to park 40 trucks and trailers. If they came to us and said, ‘We really like the Student Center but we want to change the paint color,’ my only question was, ‘Will you re-paint it the original color afterwards?’”

With a mandate to capture exteriors in Huntington, Meyer’s 100-person crew restored the downtown block of 4th Street to its 1970 look, designing an entire row of vacant storefronts,

displays and the large exterior signs of the period, from the Keith-Albee Theater and Frederick Hotel to shoe stores and insurance offices. Luckily, Meyer found the “architectural bones” of the period intact. “They hadn’t torn buildings down and replaced them with a brand new McDonald’s. You could spin around 360 degrees and see buildings that had been standing for 30, 40 or 100 years, all the way back to the founding of the city. Old storefronts might be boarded up, they might have dropped in a brand new awning or stuccoed over the brickwork, but if you scraped that off, you found the original architectural elements and the natural beauty underneath.”

When it came to recreating the crash site, Meyer accompanied McG and members of the production team, plus Spears, on a scout of the area, and was struck by how close it was to the airport. “You can see the airport runway from the crash site; it’s just a quarter mile away. Realizing they were so close to a different outcome that night makes it all the more heartbreaking,” he says. Ultimately it was decided that staging the crash at its original location was inappropriate, and production moved to the Fulton County Airport/Brown Field in Atlanta, a working commuter airfield six miles from downtown.

Matching the densely wooded hills that surrounded the actual crash site was a challenge. Meyer began by using earth-movers to terraform a flat empty field for the impact of a jetliner. Next, an old DC-9 fuselage from an airplane junkyard in the Mojave Desert was shipped to Atlanta on six flatbed trailers. Then, a forest of 100 mature 50-foot trees previously harvested by a timber company were planted and splintered by large hydraulic machinery to simulate the violence of the crash. A team led by special effects coordinator David Fletcher laid more than 3,000 feet of propane pipeline connected to 25 hundred-pound gas tanks to generate controlled fires scattered across the quarter acre. The firefighters in the scene were actually Atlanta-area firefighters, manning vintage vehicles, including two trucks that were on the scene in West Virginia on the night of November 14, 1970.

Wes Sarginson, veteran nighttime anchor at NBC affiliate WXIA-11 in Atlanta, had a direct connection to the 1970 accident. As a 27-year-old correspondent for NBC, based in Cleveland at the time, he was the first national reporter on the scene. When he visited Meyer’s vivid, detailed re-creation, based on research from photos and TV footage, Sarginson reportedly stared in disbelief, attesting on his news broadcast that evening, “It looks just like it did back then.” His assessment was reinforced when, days before McG began filming the sequence, one

of the company's crew was injured from a fallen tree limb, requiring a 911 emergency call. The EMTs who arrived were shocked at the realism of the site, with one of them questioning why he hadn't heard anything about a plane crash over his radio.

Other key locations in Atlanta included a former Ford dealership downtown, within whose gutted garage Meyer built Boone's Diner, a place where locals gathered weekly to listen to Herd games. Meyer's design for the fictional diner was inspired by McG's example of the Edward Hopper painting "The Nighthawks," and on an actual Huntington institution called Jim's, a family-owned restaurant that has served as a community meeting place for 60 years. By building on location instead of on a soundstage, he was able to incorporate adjoining exteriors.

"There was a great 1950s-era building across the street, which was derelict and due for demolishing," says Meyer, who persuaded the owners to let his team restore it in period colors. "That gave us our outside. We were then able to show cars driving up and down the street, with headlights and the reflections of pedestrians shining through the windows, and offer the immediacy of the town surrounding the restaurant."

Two more of Meyer's major sets were the team locker rooms at East Carolina and Marshall, which, he says, he "wanted to help tell the story, beyond being just, sweaty, concrete blocks of functionality. When we see the Marshall Herd at East Carolina before the crash, it's a losing team with a terrible record and they don't know the tragedy that is about to befall. So the locker room has a heavy feeling. The ceiling is low and the shadows prominent. When we get to the Marshall locker room, I wanted it to evoke a cathedral atmosphere, with high clerestory windows that allow natural light to arc through and illuminate woven mesh lockers dusted with metallic bronzing powder which we lit up light jewels. I put in arched, 'flying buttress' vaulted ceilings to give a sort of spiritual lift to the space so that when the team gets down on their knees for the pre-game prayer, it would feel as though they were in a church."

The film's Xavier game and practice sequences were filmed at Morris Brown College, which, along with Morehouse and Spellman Colleges and Clark Atlanta University, is part of the city's historic Atlanta University Center Institutions, the nation's oldest and largest consortium of African-American private institutions of higher learning, founded in 1929.

Morris Brown's modern purple-and-white Herndon Stadium, cast as Marshall's Fairfield Stadium, got a green-and-white period make-over. 1,200 feet of contemporary mesh rail was replaced with tongue-and-groove wood panel and cap; plastic seats were replaced; and LED and

largescreen displays were swapped for fully-animated vintage scoreboards. A new field was seeded and all 6,400 square yards painted shades of green to match the period field design and color saturation to stay within the specific Kodachrome palette.

Suiting up Again in the Green and White

“If I had to use one word to describe the fashion of that time it would be ‘transitional,’” says costume designer Danny Glicker. “When people think of the ‘70s, they conjure up very specific images of crazy and outrageous designs, but most of that came later. Plus, Huntington, like any small town, would naturally have been a little bit behind the curve. Essentially, it was more of a late-1960s look we were after. We worked exclusively from period research from the region, allowing us to recreate subtle details that would speak to everyone.”

For Matthew Fox’s portrayal of Red Dawson, Glicker reflected the character’s reserved manner by taking a conservative tack, sticking to classic pegged pants and slender ties, with just a hint of the wider shirt collars that heralded the new decade. For Matthew McConaughey, as the coach coming in from Ohio with some new ideas, he provided a counterpoint by introducing such fashion-forward elements as slightly wider ties and bolder prints.

Glicker’s biggest challenge was restoring Marshall’s fighting colors, the green and white.

“The Marshall green of the 1970s, a very bright Kelly green, no longer exists. It fell out of vogue because it’s difficult to dye fabrics that green with colorfastness, not to mention that some of the chemicals commonly used then are no longer legal,” he explains.

Nevertheless, compromise was not an option. “Anyone knowledgeable about Marshall University speaks about the green with a lot of affection and there’s a real yearning to see that again so, even though it took a lot of work and the help of a lot of talented dyers, I’m very excited about being able to put the true green and white back on the field.”

The designer got a break when it came to recreating the period letterman jackets. Working initially from old photos, he experimented with various fabrics and stitch-work to create several prototypes but still didn’t feel he was getting it right. Then, typical of the atmosphere of cooperation that had developed between the community and the film crew, someone in town volunteered his own vintage jacket as a pattern.

Glicker also reproduced uniforms for three rival school teams—Morehead, Xavier and East Carolina—and outfitted thousands of extras.

He found one retro-wear fan in Anthony Mackie, who fondly remembers, as a kid, raiding his father’s closet to make Halloween costumes. “When they told me it would be polyester slacks and button-down collars, it sounded like a dream come true,” says Mackie, with a laugh. “I put my bid in early for certain things. They don’t make leather jackets like they used to, with the funky patchwork, and platform shoes for men—you can’t even find those anymore.”

24, 19, 32... Hut, Hut... Hike!

It fell to renowned sports-action coordinator Mark Ellis (“The Longest Yard,” “Invincible”) to make sure the teams not only looked the part, but played it. “We Are Marshall” includes portions of three significant gridiron contests: the away-game played at East Carolina on the day of the crash; the game against Morehead ten months later, which marked the reconstructed team’s inauspicious debut; and the surprising Xavier game, which followed.

But it’s not just generic football action. Says Ellis, “The story is about relationships and community, and the games support that; they’re part of the rebuilding process. It’s about a new group of players and freshmen coming in and taking on the positions of those who were lost.”

McConaughey, who worked with Ellis, McG, Linden and Lengyel on staging the sequences, notes that, “Each executed play had to represent exactly what Lengyel had coached, and had to be specific to certain players. When we change offense from the power-I to the veer, you have to see that evolve in the game. You have to see it work and you have to see it fail.”

Ellis studied archival footage of the Marshall games and consulted former coaches, including Lengyel, for their first-hand knowledge. “I asked, ‘What was the terminology? What were the cadence calls? What was your philosophy?’ And that became our blueprint.”

Following a two-week open call that yielded more than 4,000 applicants, with additional recruiting across the country, Ellis ended up with a couple hundred potential actor/players to represent the home and opposing teams on screen. After traditional NFL-style tryouts, that number narrowed to the necessary 65. It then became Ellis’ job to turn them into working units.

“These guys became a team in the two weeks of hell I put them through in the Atlanta heat doing two-a-days,” he says. “That’s when they started bonding. We didn’t have air

conditioning in the locker rooms. I ran ‘em in the morning, I ran ‘em in the afternoon and then we watched film. I barely fed ‘em for lunch. They were killing each other.”

Although, in a pure sense, the players were acting and knew exactly who was going to make the interception and who was going to get tackled on the 32-yard line, Ellis points out, “If they don’t treat it like a real play, like live, wide-open football, they’re going to lose their credibility. There’s no way to fake this stuff. They have to pin their ears back and play as hard as they can and look like they intend to win every second. Once they understand that, you have the makings of a great action sequence.”

The Legacy

The Thundering Herd did not recover quickly. Despite two unexpected and thrilling victories that first comeback season, Marshall University football was, as Spears admits, “a losing team. Even leading up to the crash we had our troubles—NCAA violations, the longest losing streak in the nation— and rebuilding from all that seemed insurmountable. Lengyel and his staff were the first step in that process, but there were plenty of naysayers.”

What Lengyel, Dawson, the players, other coaches and administration understood, was that their purpose in 1971 was not necessarily to win football games but to lay a solid foundation for the future so that, one day, winning would be *possible* again. And they were right.

In 1984, Marshall finished 6-5, its first winning season in 20 years. In 1987, the Thundering Herd earned its first national exposure in Division I-AA with a playoff appearance, a feat it repeated the following year. In the six seasons from 1990 through 1995, under coach Jim Donnan’s tenure, the Herd was 64-21 and made the Division I-AA championship game four times. It won its first I-AA championship in 1992 and again in 1996, when former Marshall player Bobby Pruett coached the team to an undefeated 15-0 season, with the help of future NFL talent Randy Moss.

After being the losingest team in the country in the 1970s, with only 23 wins in 10 years, remarkably, Marshall became the winningest team in the 1990s, with a 114-25 record.

“After we won the Mid-America Conference championship in ’97, the fans were exuberant. They stormed the field and tore down the goal posts,” recalls Spears, who was there at the time. “I remember thinking, ‘well, there go the goal posts. They’ll probably carry ‘em

down the street and we'll have to go pick them up later.' But we couldn't find them. We finally located them the next day. They were at the cemetery, laid at the obelisk with a sign saying, 'Here's the championship that was denied you.'"

Though Jack Lengyel left Marshall in 1975 and went on to numerous career heights, most notably as athletics director for the U.S. Naval Academy, he still considers Marshall his second home and has returned to commemorate the tragedy's 20- and 30-year anniversaries.

Red Dawson fulfilled his promise to stay the year, then left upon completion of the 1971 season. He never returned to the game, though he continued to live in Huntington and remained a loyal Herd fan. Known to frequent tailgate parties and then leave the stadium, he did not attend another Marshall game until 2000. He and Lengyel stayed in touch, having shared the indescribable bond of that very difficult and rewarding time.

"When you live with a story like this, maybe you don't want to talk about it right away, maybe that's why it took 36 years before this story found its way onto the screen," notes Basil Iwanyk. "Maybe it needed a full generation of time to pass."

Ultimately, "Pain can last a moment. It can last a day, a week or years, but it cannot last forever. The only thing that can last forever is if you quit," offers McG, recalling a sentiment expressed by Lance Armstrong. "If you want to honor those who have fallen, I believe the best thing you can do is move forward and live the best life you can, knowing that's what they would want for you."

ABOUT THE CAST

MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY (Jack Lengyel) earned a People's Choice Award in 2005 for his starring role in the hit film "Sahara," co-starring Penelope Cruz and Steve Zahn. "Sahara," which opened at the top of the weekend box office, also marked the first major motion picture produced by his production company, j.k. livin productions. McConaughey followed with a starring role opposite Al Pacino in the drama "Two for the Money," before closing the year as People Magazine's "Sexiest Man Alive."

Among his film credits are the popular romantic comedies "Failure to Launch," with Sarah Jessica Parker, and "How to Lose A Guy in 10 Days," opposite Kate Hudson; the

ensemble “Thirteen Conversations About One Thing”; the horror thriller “Frailty,” written and directed by Bill Paxton; the sci-fi adventure “Reign of Fire”; and Adam Shankman’s hit romantic comedy “The Wedding Planner,” with Jennifer Lopez.

McConaughey also starred in Steven Spielberg’s “Amistad,” Robert Zemeckis’ “Contact,” Ron Howard’s “EDtv,” Richard Linklater’s “Dazed and Confused” and Joel Schumacher’s critically acclaimed courtroom drama “A Time to Kill,” as well as “Angels in the Outfield,” “Lone Star,” “Glory Days” and “U-571.”

He is currently in production with co-star Kate Hudson on the romantic adventure “Fool’s Gold,” directed by Andy Tennant and scheduled for a 2008 release.

McConaughey’s production company is currently in development on numerous projects with Warner Bros. Pictures, Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures and Imagine Entertainment. j.k. livin also executive produced the feature documentary “Hands on A Hard Body.”

MATTHEW FOX (Red Dawson) currently stars as the conflicted, heroic doctor, Jack Shepherd, on the hit ABC series “Lost.” For his work on the Emmy-winning Best Drama, Fox shared the 2005 Screen Actors Guild Ensemble Award and was nominated for Golden Globe and Television Critics Association Awards for achievement in dramatic acting.

Previously, Fox starred in Golden Globe Award-winning series “Party of Five.”

In 1999, he won attention for his touching turn opposite Donald Sutherland in the made-for-television drama “Behind the Mask,” then returned to episodic work as a private investigator whose near-death experience bridges a gap to the spirit world in “Haunted.”

Fox will next star in the political thriller “Vantage Point,” opposite Dennis Quaid, Forest Whitaker and William Hurt, set for a 2007 release.

IAN McSHANE (Paul Griffen) won the 2005 Golden Globe Award for Best Actor in a Television Drama and earned Emmy and Screen Actors Guild Award nominations for his performance as the charismatic Al Swearngen in the second season of HBO’s hit series “Deadwood.” For his work during the series’ 2004 debut season, McShane received the Television Critics Association Award, with a second nomination for the 2005 season, and was named one of GQ Magazine’s “Men of the Year.”

McShane has starred in over 25 films over a long and distinguished career, including “The Battle of Britain,” “The Last of Sheila,” “Villain,” co-starring Richard Burton, “Exposed,” and “Agent Cody Banks.” In Jonathan Glazer’s acclaimed “Sexy Beast,” he gave a riveting performance as the sinister gangster Teddy Bass, opposite Sir Ben Kingsley and Ray Winstone.

Recently, he joined the ensemble cast of writer-director Rodrigo Garcia’s drama “Nine Lives” and co-starred in the Woody Allen film, “Scoop.” He will next lend his vocal talents to the upcoming animated feature “Shrek The Third,” as Captain Hook, the animated fantasy “Coraline,” and the animated comedy “Kung Fu Panda,” with an all-star voice cast including Jackie Chan. Among his upcoming screen appearances are the action comedy “Hot Rod,” and the thriller “Case 39,” opposite Renée Zellweger, both scheduled for a 2007 release.

McShane has also enjoyed a long career in both British and American television, including a role in David Wolper’s seminal 1970s miniseries “Roots.” Last season, he was seen on both BBC and BBC America’s comedy series “Trust.” A starring turn in “Whose Life Is It Anyway?,” for Granada TV, the role of Heathcliff in “Wuthering Heights” for the BBC, and Harold Pinter’s Emmy-winning “The Caretaker” are among his other television highlights. He has also portrayed Judas in NBC’s “Jesus of Nazareth,” directed by Franco Zeffirelli; Prince Rainer in the network’s “The Grace Kelly Story”; and the title role in Masterpiece Theatre’s “Disraeli.” His additional miniseries credits include “Charlie the Kid,” “A.D.,” “The Great Escape II,” “Marco Polo,” “Evergreen” and Dan Curtis’ “War and Remembrance.”

In the late 1980s, he formed McShane Productions, which produced the much-adored “Lovejoy” for the BBC and A&E, a project that gave him a vehicle in which to star as well as produce and direct. He followed by producing and starring in the lead role of Madson in the comedy drama “Soul Survivors,” for BBC and Showtime.

In 2000, McShane returned to London’s West End for his musical stage debut in Cameron Mackintosh’s successful production of “The Witches of Eastwick,” as Darryl Van Horne. His stage career has included roles as Hal in the original cast of “Loot,” the title role of “The Admirable Crichton” at the Chichester Festival, Tom in Tennessee Williams’ “The Glass Menagerie” and Charlie in “The Big Knife.” He co-starred with Dame Judi Dench and Sir Ian McKellen in “Promise,” which successfully played London before moving to Broadway. In Los Angeles, he starred in three productions at The Matrix Theatre, including the world premiere of

Larry Atlas' "Yield of the Long Bond" and two others for which he received the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle Award: "Inadmissible Evidence" and "Betrayal."

ANTHONY MACKIE (Nate Ruffin) had five features on movie screens in 2006. In addition to "We Are Marshall," he starred in "Half Nelson," with Ryan Gosling adapted from director Ryan Fleck's Sundance-winning short "Gowanus Brooklyn"; in Preston Whitmore's "Crossover"; in Frank E. Flowers ensemble crime drama "Haven," opposite Orlando Bloom and Bill Paxton; and in the film adaptation of Richard Price's "Freedomland," starring Samuel L. Jackson.

He will next play Olympic track-and-field legend Jesse Owens in a biopic to shoot next summer.

Classically trained at the Juilliard School of Drama, Mackie made an auspicious film debut as Eminem's nemesis, Papa Doc, in Curtis Hanson's "8 Mile." His performance caught the attention of Spike Lee, who subsequently cast Mackie in the recent Toronto Film Festival Masters Program selection "Sucker Free City" and "She Hate Me." He also appeared in Clint Eastwood's Academy Award-winning "Million Dollar Baby," opposite Hilary Swank, Morgan Freeman and Eastwood, as well as in Jonathan Demme's "The Manchurian Candidate," alongside Denzel Washington and Liev Schreiber, and the comedy "The Man," starring Samuel L. Jackson.

Mackie earned IFP Spirit and Gotham Award nominations for his performance in Rodney Evans' "Brother to Brother," which won the 2004 Special Dramatic Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and Best First Feature at the Independent Spirit Awards. In 2005, he appeared opposite David Strathairn, Timothy Hutton and Leelee Sobieski in "Heavens Fall," based on the historic Scottsboro Boys' trials, an independent feature that premiered at the 2006 SXSW Film Festival in Austin.

KATE MARA (Annie Cantrell) is currently filming "Shooter," opposite Mark Wahlberg, scheduled for a 2007 release.

Most recently, she appeared as Heath Ledger's daughter in Ang Lee's Academy Award-winning drama "Brokeback Mountain," and co-starred in a five-episode arc on the Fox Television Emmy Award-winning series "24."

Mara began acting at the age of 14. She first appeared in Sydney Pollack's romantic drama "Random Hearts." She then co-starred in Gary Winick's coming-of-age film "Tadpole," which earned 2002 Sundance Film Festival honors for both director and film, and co-starred in the independent feature "The Californians."

Also an accomplished singer, Mara made her professional debut at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in "Landscape of the Body," with Lili Taylor.

JANUARY JONES (Carole Dawson) most recently earned acclaim for her co-starring role opposite Tommy Lee Jones in Jones' feature directorial debut, "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada," which screened at the Cannes Film Festival.

She will next be seen in the independent film "Swedish Auto," with Lukas Haas.

Jones made her screen debut as Gary Sinise's love interest in "It's the Rage." Since then, she has played supporting roles in Barry Levinson's comedy "Bandits," Steven Soderbergh's "Full Frontal," and the Jack Nicholson/Adam Sandler comedy, "Anger Management." She also had a small role in Richard Curtis' comedy "Love, Actually."

Jones was selected from thousands of aspiring talents to be cast as Cadence Flaherty, the sister of the not-so-blushing bride in "American Wedding," the third installment in the "American Pie" series. Following that, she appeared in "Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights."

For television, Jones recently completed a recurring role in the debut season of Showtime's acclaimed series "Huff" and, in 2007, will be seen on AMC in its first original drama series, "Mad Men," written and executive produced by Matt Weiner, a writer on "The Sopranos."

BRIAN GERAGHTY (Tom Bogdan) most recently starred in Emilio Estevez's biopic "Bobby," which centers on the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. Geraghty, whose performance in the film was selected by The New York Times as scene-stealing and a breakthrough, was part of the film's ensemble cast, which included Anthony Hopkins, Sharon Stone, Demi Moore, Lindsay Lohan and Elijah Wood.

Earlier this year he appeared in director Andy Davis' "The Guardian," opposite Kevin Costner and Ashton Kutcher; in "Conversations with Other Women," with Aaron Eckhart and

Helena Bonham Carter; and in Terry Zwigoff's "Art School Confidential," starring John Malkovich, Jim Broadbent and Anjelica Huston.

Among his feature credits are the Sam Mendes adaptation of "Jarhead," in which he starred opposite Jake Gyllenhaal, Jamie Foxx and Peter Sarsgaard; the horror remake of "When a Stranger Calls"; "Stateside," with Val Kilmer; "The Optimist," with Leelee Sobieski; and "Cruel World," opposite Edward Furlong.

Prior to launching his screen career, Geraghty had guest-starring roles on several top television series, including HBO's award-winning "The Sopranos," NBC's Emmy-winning "Law & Order" and the critically acclaimed, offbeat comedy series "Ed."

He began his professional career on stage with credits that include roles in productions of "Berlin," "Midnight Moonlight," "Snipers" and "Romeo and Juliet."

Geraghty is an active supporter of the Surfrider Foundation, a non-profit environmental organization working to preserve our oceans, waves and beaches.

DAVID STRATHAIRN (President Dedmon) most recently won the Volpi Cup at the Venice Film Festival and earned nominations from the Academy, Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild, BAFTA and Independent Spirit Awards for his compelling portrait of legendary CBS news broadcaster Edward R. Murrow in George Clooney's 2005 Oscar-nominated drama "Good Night, and Good Luck."

His 2005 Independent Spirit nomination was the fourth in a stellar career that dates back to his 1980 motion picture debut in John Sayles' first film, "The Return of the Secaucus Seven." Strathairn subsequently collaborated with Sayles on seven titles, winning the IFP honor for his supporting performance in "City of Hope," while collecting two additional nominations for "Passion Fish" and "Limbo."

His early screen efforts included supporting roles in Mike Nichols' "Silkwood," Fred Schepisi's "Iceman," James Foley's "At Close Range" and Robert M. Young's "Dominick and Eugene," as well as Sayles' acclaimed dramas "Matewan" and "Eight Men Out," and his 1984 satire, "The Brother from Another Planet."

Turning the decade, Strathairn continued a busy screen career with co-starring roles in several critically acclaimed films, including Tim Robbins' directorial debut, "Bob Roberts"; Penny Marshall's "A League of Their Own"; "Losing Isaiah"; Sydney Pollack's "The Firm";

“Sneakers”; Taylor Hackford’s adaptation of the Stephen King novel “Dolores Claiborne”; and Jodie Foster’s “Home for the Holidays”; as well as two projects with Curtis Hansen: “The River Wild” and the Oscar-winning “L.A. Confidential,” in which Strathairn shared a Screen Actors Guild Award nomination with the all-star ensemble cast. His additional movie credits include “Memphis Belle,” “A Map of the World,” “Simon Birch,” “Lost in Yonkers,” “Missing in America,” Michael Hoffman’s adaptation of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Phil Kaufman’s “Twisted” and “The Notorious Bettie Page.”

He has also maintained a high profile in the theatrical world, with roles at such venues as the Manhattan Theatre Club, the New York Shakespeare Festival, SoHo Rep, the Hartford Stage Company, Ensemble Studio Theatre and Seattle Repertory. He will next be seen in Gregory Hoblit’s thriller “Fracture.”

ARLEN ESCARPETA (Reggie Oliver) earned critical acclaim for his breakout role of an honor student caught with a handgun at school in the independent drama “American Gun.” The film, which premiered at the 2005 Toronto Film Festival, also starred Forest Whitaker, Marcia Gay Harden and Donald Sutherland.

His earlier film credits include a role in Carl Franklin’s courtroom thriller “High Crimes,” opposite Morgan Freeman and Ashley Judd.

Following “We Are Marshall,” Escarpeta will star opposite Oliver Platt in the independent comedy spoof “The Ten,” from director David Wain of “Wet Hot American Summer.”

Best known for his three-season role as charismatic college athlete Sam Walker on NBC’s “American Dreams,” Escarpeta made his television debut as a guest star on “Boston Public.” He has since appeared in guest-starring roles on hit shows such as CBS’ “Judging Amy,” F/X’s “The Shield,” G4TechTV’s “Players” and, more recently, NBC’s long-running “ER” and the hit CBS drama “Cold Case.” He also appeared in the pilot episode of NBC’s “Boomtown.”

Escarpeta is a volunteer for the Young Saints Scholarship Foundation and is heavily involved in charities, including the Starlight Starbright Children’s Foundation and the Union Station Foundation.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

McG (Director / Producer) made his feature film directorial debut with “Charlie’s Angels,” which boasted the biggest box office opening for a first-time director. The film debuted at #1 in the U.S. with over \$40 million at the box office, and also opened at #1 in 31 territories internationally, grossing over \$250 million worldwide. McG also directed the sequel “Charlie’s Angels: Full Throttle,” which went on to gross another \$265 million.

With two hit films and over \$500 million at the box office, McG formed a production company, Wonderland Sound and Vision, which has a first-look film deal with Columbia Pictures, a television deal with Warner Bros. Television and a record deal with Warner Music.

Wonderland most recently released the low budget feature “Stay Alive,” which opened at \$10.7 million. The company is currently shooting “Revenge of the Nerds” for an August 2007 release.

For television, Wonderland produces the primetime phenomenon “The O.C.,” which had its fourth season premiere in November, and “Supernatural,” which is currently in its second season on The CW. Together with Steven Spielberg, Wonderland produced “The Dan Finnerty Show,” a special that aired on Bravo last year.

McG began his career producing records for rock group Sugar Ray, directing commercials for The Gap and Coca Cola, as well as directing over 50 music videos for a wide array of recording artists including Sublime, Korn and Wyclef Jean. These music videos have contributed to the sale of over 100 million albums worldwide.

Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, McG grew up in Newport Beach, California. He graduated from University of California Irvine with a degree in psychology.

BASIL IWANYK (Producer) currently heads his own production company, Thunder Road Pictures, where he most recently produced the Harrison Ford thriller “Firewall.”

Iwanyk began his film industry career as an agent trainee at United Talent Agency.

He joined Warner Bros. Pictures in 1995 as a creative executive and was promoted to Vice President of Production two years later. During his tenure at the studio, Iwanyk was involved with several films, including the Oscar-winning “Training Day,” “Ocean’s Eleven,” “Batman & Robin” and the Christopher Nolan thriller “Insomnia.” He was named an “executive to watch”

by The Hollywood Reporter in their annual Next Generation issue that profiles young executives with promising futures in the entertainment industry.

In 2000, Iwanyk became President of Worldwide Production at Intermedia Films, overseeing a wide variety of projects, including “K-19: The Widowmaker,” “Basic,” “Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines,” Spike Jonze’s Oscar-winning “Adaptation,” “Dark Blue,” “National Security,” “The Life of David Gale,” “Welcome to Mooseport,” “Laws of Attraction,” Renny Harlin’s thriller “Mindhunters” and the Oscar-nominated drama “The Quiet American.”

JAMIE LINDEN’s (Screenwriter / Story) first script, “Things To Do Before I Die,” was purchased by Warner Bros. Pictures and led to a writing deal with the studio. This, in turn, led to an introduction to producer Basil Iwanyk, who shared Linden’s interest in making a film about the Marshall University plane crash.

Linden recently finished adapting the bestseller Dogs Of Babel for producer David Heyman. He will next re-team with Iwanyk for an upcoming adaptation of “Ski To Die: The Bill Johnson Story,” depicting the life and times of one of America’s most celebrated downhill skiers, who scored Olympic Gold in the 1984 winter games.

“We Are Marshall,” is Linden’s first produced script.

CORY HELMS (Story) is currently working on another script. “We Are Marshall” is his first motion picture credit.

JEANNE ALLGOOD (Executive Producer) is currently the executive in charge of motion picture development and production for Wonderland Sound & Vision, filmmaker McG’s multimedia production company. This is her first feature film producing credit.

Allgood has worked on more than 20 films as a production executive with such companies as Jersey Films, Outlaw Productions and DreamWorks SKG.

She began her career as an assistant to theater legend Michael Kahn, Juilliard’s Drama Director and the Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, DC. Encouraged by Kahn to pursue her love of movies, Allgood left for Los Angeles, where a chance introduction to Danny DeVito won her a job at Jersey Films.

After eighteen months, she joined producers Bobby Newmyer and Jeff Silver as a creative executive at their Warner Bros.-based company, Outlaw Productions. Her two-year tenure at Outlaw was followed by four years with Cathy Konrad at her Sony-based production company, where Allgood worked on such films as “The Sweetest Thing,” starring Cameron Diaz, and “Kate and Leopold,” with Meg Ryan, as well as James Mangold’s 2003 thriller “Identity.” Allgood next moved into a production executive post at DreamWorks, supervising such projects as Wes Craven’s hit thriller “Red Eye,” the comedy “She’s the Man” and the inspirational drama “Dreamer.”

She joined McG in his production entity a year ago and was the one who obtained the “We Are Marshall” script from Basil Iwanyk for development through Wonderland.

BRENT O’CONNOR (Executive Producer) reunites with producer Basil Iwanyk after their recent collaboration on the Harrison Ford thriller “Firewall.”

O’Connor was an executive producer on the 2005 action thriller “Elektra,” starring Jennifer Garner, and the 2004 family adventure “Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed.” His co-producing credits include “K-19: The Widowmaker,” starring Harrison Ford and Liam Neeson, and “Bulletproof Monk,” starring Chow Yun-Fat and Seann William Scott.

Early in his career, O’Connor served as an electrician and business agent. He was production manager on a variety of feature films, including the Arnold Schwarzenegger thriller “The Sixth Day”; the comedic romp “Rat Race,” starring Cuba Gooding Jr., Whoopi Goldberg, John Cleese and Rowan Atkinson; Gus van Sant’s Academy Award-winning “Good Will Hunting,” starring Matt Damon, Robin Williams and Ben Affleck; and “Seven Years in Tibet,” with Brad Pitt. His other credits as production manager include “Eye See You,” “Jumanji,” “Deep Rising,” “Disturbing Behavior” and “Andre.”

THOMAS TULL (Executive Producer) is the Chairman and CEO of Legendary Pictures, which recently entered into a five-year, 25-picture deal with Warner Bros. Pictures. Legendary reaped resounding success with their first joint effort, “Batman Begins,” and went on to collaborate in 2006 on Bryan Singer’s “Superman Returns” and M. Night Shyamalan’s “Lady in the Water.” Among their upcoming projects are “300,” the film adaptation of Frank Miller’s graphic novel of the same name; “Trick ‘r Treat,” written and directed by “Superman Returns”

co-writer Michael Dougherty and produced by Bryan Singer; Roland Emmerich's "10,000 B.C."; "Where the Wild Things Are," directed by Spike Jonze; and Christopher Nolan's "The Dark Knight," the follow-up to "Batman Begins."

Tull was previously president and a director of The Convex Group, a media and entertainment holding company in Atlanta that invests in new media networks, launched by WebMD founder Jeff Arnold. He executed M&A activity, including the acquisitions of content company How Stuff Works and content distribution platforms LidRock and FlexPlay, and developed the company's relationships and partnerships with motion picture, music and videogame companies. Prior to Convex, Tull was a principal at the Southeast Interactive Technology Funds, the largest venture-capital IT fund in the Southeast.

Tull's first foray into Hollywood came when he was a partner at a North Carolina-based investment fund that specialized in media and technology. In 1996, he helped craft the deal creating Red Storm Entertainment, which made games based on Tom Clancy's books. He relied on his experience as a venture capitalist to raise the initial capitalization for Legendary Pictures from a consortium of blue chip investors—ABRY Partners, Banc of America Capital Investors and AGI Direct Investments among them. Tull architected the unique structure of the company, which was awarded the prestigious Deal of the Year in the entertainment industry in 2005 by IDD Magazine.

SCOTT MEDNICK (Executive Producer) is a member of the management team of Legendary Pictures, the production company which in 2005 entered into a five-year, 25-picture deal with Warner Bros. He was an executive producer of this past summer's "Superman Returns," and is an executive producer on the upcoming films "300," Roland Emmerich's "10,000 B.C." and "Where the Wild Things Are," being directed by Spike Jonze.

Mednick has been a leader in the entertainment, marketing and technology sectors for the last 25 years. He has been involved in the marketing for almost 200 films, including "Jerry Maguire," "Coal Miner's Daughter," "This Is Spinal Tap," "X-Men" and "Dirty Dancing." His individual entertainment clients have included Tom Cruise, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Denzel Washington. Additionally, Mednick has created the logos for such Hollywood entities as Sony Pictures, Columbia Pictures, TriStar Pictures and Legendary Pictures.

He is also the former President and CEO of Peter Guber's Mandalay Branded Entertainment. Prior to Mandalay, Mednick founded THINK New Ideas, Inc., a marketing and communications company for the Information Age which serviced the communications and interactive needs of major corporations including Oracle, Coca-Cola, Reebok, Sega, Time Warner, Sony, Pioneer Electronics, Disney, Chrysler and many others. As Chairman and CEO, Mednick oversaw the quintupling of THINK's billing and market cap within 18 months of its initial public offering. In addition, the company was named as one of the top ten interactive agencies of the year by both Adweek magazine and the Advertising Club of New York in its first year of operations.

In addition to his corporate responsibilities, Mednick was invited to be a part of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities Task Force for Children and Youth at Risk under President Clinton, chaired by the First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. He served for 10 years on the National Board of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Inner City Games Foundation and now sits on the board of directors of After-School All-Stars, founded by Governor Schwarzenegger. Mednick served on the Board of Directors of Earth Day 1990, for which he also created the logo and communications materials. He is a founding member of the Board of ECO (Earth Communications Office), which mobilizes the entertainment industry on behalf of the environment. He also serves as a trustee of the University of Santa Monica.

Mednick, a Boston native, has an M.A. in Applied Psychology and a B.F.A. in Graphic Design, and was named Print Art Director of the Year/West by Adweek. Mednick has had four pieces of his work selected for inclusion in the permanent collection of the Library of Congress.

SHANE HURLBUT (Director of Photography) earned an A.S.C. Award nomination for his first feature, HBO's award-winning biopic "The Rat Pack," directed by Rob Cohen and starring Ray Liotta, Joe Mantegna and Don Cheadle. The citation distinguished him as the youngest cinematographer ever nominated for the award for a debut feature, and the second youngest cameraman ever nominated.

Hurlbut and Cohen reunited on the thriller "Skulls," followed by John Stockwell's critically acclaimed romantic drama "crazy/beautiful" and Charles Stone III's popular marching band extravaganza "Drumline." He re-teamed with Stone on the Bernie Mac sports comedy "Mr. 3000" and continued his association with director Stockwell on the underwater treasure-

hunting film “Into the Blue.” Hurlbut also guided camera work on the features “11:14,” Bill Paxton’s period sports drama “The Greatest Game Ever Played,” and the recent feature releases “Something New” and writer/director Vondie Curtis-Hall’s crime thriller “Waist Deep.”

One of the industry’s most in-demand commercial cinematographers, Hurlbut has also guided camera work on TV spots for such clients as Disneyworld, Verizon, KFC, Dunkin Donuts, Pizza Hut, McDonalds, and Burger King, collaborating with such directors as McG, Bob Giraldi, Charles Stone III and Jan de Bont.

In the music video genre, Hurlbut employed cutting-edge visuals in projects for such musical artists as Nirvana, Stone Temple Pilots, The Rolling Stones, Filter, Tori Amos, Semisonic, Salt-N-Pepa and Smashing Pumpkins.

TOM MEYER (Production Designer) has designed for such feature films as “A Lot Like Love,” “Blue Crush,” “Catch That Kid” and the short film “Whatever We Do,” a 2003 Sundance Film Festival entry produced by Tobey Maguire. Meyer made his debut as a designer on the 2002 comedy crime caper “Welcome to Collinwood,” directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, and produced by George Clooney and Steven Soderbergh. Meyer’s next project, with Clooney and Soderbergh serving as executive producers, is Scott Burns’ “The Half Life of Timofey Berezin,” set for a March 2007 release.

Meyer’s credits as an art director include John Stockwell’s “crazy/beautiful”; Christopher McQuarrie’s directorial debut, “The Way of the Gun”; “The Crow: Salvation”; and “No Vacancy.” He also logged small-screen credits for a variety of commercials, music videos and series pilots.

He began his career as a 13-year-old intern at the famed Actors Studio of Louisville, one of the country’s most honored regional theaters. With a dozen years in the theatre world, Meyer was a resident design associate at the Seattle Repertory from 1993-96, where he designed such stage productions premieres as Arthur Laurents’s “Jolson Sings Again,” Jon Robie Baitz’s “A Fair Country” and Wendy Wasserstein’s “An American Daughter,” all directed by award winner Daniel Sullivan, as well as “Bill Irwin’s Experiments,” “Pretty Fire” and “Suburbia.”

PRISCILLA NEDD FRIENDLY (Editor) studied film editing at the American Film Institute, and began her career as an assistant editor in television before moving on to feature

films. Her big break came when she was hired by Academy Award-winning editor Peter Zinner to serve as the associate editor on Taylor Hackford's Oscar-nominated drama "An Officer and A Gentleman."

Through Hackford's recommendation, Nedd Friendly gained her first solo editing assignment on "Eddie and the Cruisers," a year later. She went on to edit such films as "The Flamingo Kid," for director Garry Marshall; Jerry Schatzberg's "Street Smart"; David Seltzer's "Lucas"; "Tucker: The Man and His Dream," for director Francis Ford Coppola; "Pretty Woman," which reunited her with Garry Marshall; Irwin Winkler's "Guilty By Suspicion"; and Michael Caton-Jones' "Doc Hollywood."

Nedd Friendly more recently edited the hit comedy "American Pie," directed by Paul and Chris Weitz. She reteamed with the Weitz brothers on "Down to Earth," starring Chris Rock, then collaborated with director Rob Minkoff on the films "Stuart Little 2" and "The Haunted Mansion." Nedd Friendly most recently edited the hit comedy sequel "Big Momma's House 2."

GREGG LONDON (Editor) most recently served as additional film editor on the comedy "Big Momma's House 2," starring Martin Lawrence. He has compiled ten associate editor credits dating back to the 1991 comedy "Doc Hollywood," starring Michael J. Fox. His more recent projects include the romantic comedy "Down to Earth," starring Chris Rock and Regina King, as well as the 2003 family comedy thriller "The Haunted Mansion" and the BAFTA Award-nominated "Stuart Little 2," both directed by Rob Minkoff.

London edited the 2000 Vince Van Patten comedy "The Flunky" and completed the first cut of "The Woman in the Moon," starring Maria de Madeiros and Portia de Rossi, as well as the thriller "The Perfect Nanny."

CHRISTOPHE BECK (Music) has scored numerous films in virtually every genre, from the remake of "The Pink Panther" and "The Sentinel," earlier this year, to "Under the Tuscan Sun," the film adaptation of the best-selling novel.

Beck began his scoring career on the Canadian television series "White Fang," and from there went on to score the television series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," seasons two through four. He earned an Emmy Award for Outstanding Music Composition for his work on "Buffy"

in season three (1998) and, after completing one more season on the show, moved into film scoring.

His recent film credits include “Elektra,” “Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous,” and “Two for the Money.” Previously, he scored “Garfield,” “Cheaper by the Dozen,” “Just Married,” “Confidence,” “The Alarmist,” “Guinevere,” and “Bring It On.”

MARY VIOLA (Co-Producer) has served as Vice President of Thunder Road Pictures for the last three years. Previously, she worked in the development department of Jerry Bruckheimer Films on movies such as “Pirates of the Caribbean,” “Bad Boys 2” and “Black Hawk Down.” She got her start working for director Barry Sonnenfeld on “Wild Wild West.”

Viola is currently co-producing “Einstein’s Children” for Gold Circle Films.

DANNY GLICKER (Costume Designer) was honored by the Costume Designers Guild with their Excellence in Contemporary Film Award for his work on the 2005 drama “Transamerica,” which starred Golden Globe winner Felicity Huffman.

He gained early experience in his teens working on Broadway shows such as “The Secret Garden,” “Nick & Nora” and the Tony Award-winning musical “Grand Hotel.” He segued into the movie arena while still an undergraduate at the Rhode Island School of Design, assisting costume designer Kathy O’Rear on Robert Redford’s 1994 Oscar-nominated drama “Quiz Show.”

Glicker went on to design Michael Cuesta’s celebrated and controversial drama, “L.I.E.”

He then began an ongoing collaboration with the Polish Brothers on their visionary “Northfork,” which starred James Woods and Nick Nolte, and proceeded to design for a number of acclaimed films that include Craig Lucas’ drama “The Dying Gaul” and Marcos Siega’s black satire “Pretty Persuasion.”

Glicker’s most recent credits include Jason Reitman’s directorial debut, “Thank You for Smoking,” starring Aaron Eckhart, Maria Bello, Robert Duvall and William H. Macy, as well as the horror hit “The Hills Have Eyes.”

His work will next be seen in the Polish Brothers’ “The Astronaut Farmer,” starring Billy Bob Thornton and Virginia Madsen, and the highly anticipated, as-yet untitled project written

and directed by Academy Award winner Alan Ball and starring Aaron Eckhart, Maria Bello, Toni Collette, and newcomer Summer Bishil.

MARK ELLIS (Stunt Coordinator) is co-founder and president of ReelSports, a leader in sports entertainment production that has redefined the depiction of sports action in media, from movies and television to commercials and video games. During his career as a second unit director and sports action coordinator, Ellis directed and/or coached a number of award-winning actors and Hall of Fame athletes in such movies as “Miracle,” “The Longest Yard,” “The Rookie,” “Coach Carter,” “The Replacements,” “Any Given Sunday,” the hit comedy “The Benchwarmers” and, earlier this year, the football drama “Invincible,” starring Mark Wahlberg.

His more than 30 film and television credits also include “Mr. 3000,” “Rebound,” “The Perfect Score,” “Radio,” “Hardball” and “Summer Catch.” A wide receiver at Appalachian State before transferring to Guilford College and, subsequently, the University of South Carolina, Ellis envisioned a career as a college coach before Hollywood drafted him in 1992 with a job as assistant football coordinator on the gridiron drama “The Program,” starring James Caan, filmed at Ellis’ alma mater.

Over the next nine years, Ellis worked on film and television projects including “Varsity Blues,” “Rise and Walk: The Dennis Byrd Story,” “Jerry Maguire” and “The Waterboy.” Recognizing the opportunity to capitalize on a new niche in the entertainment/sports industry, Ellis formed ReelSports in 2001, the only multi-sport film company in the world. He has consulted on almost every major sports genre portrayed in motion pictures, including football, basketball, baseball and hockey. His collaborative work has been honored with five ESPY nominations, with “The Rookie” and “Miracle” chosen as Best Sports Movie of the Year.

JACK LENGYEL (Technical Advisor) has made a lasting and positive influence at numerous institutions during his four-decade career that encompasses roles as football coach and university administrator.

He earned his bachelor’s degree in physical education from Akron in 1957 and a Master’s degree in education from Kent State three years later. He received a commission in the U.S. Army after completing the ROTC program at Akron, where he was the Distinguished Military Graduate, and later spent 12 years in the U.S. Air Force Reserve, achieving the rank of captain.

Although he has worked for numerous universities, Lengyel is best known as the athletics director at the U.S. Naval Academy, where he served 13 years, from 1988-2001, as the first civilian to hold that post. He played a major role in improving the athletics facilities at the Academy, one of the nation's largest athletics departments, with 30 sports. During his tenure at Annapolis, the Midshipmen won 60% of their contests, including a 76% winning record vs. Army during his last four years as athletics director. Lengyel is currently a member of the Naval Academy Foundation Trustees.

His efforts to promote the Naval Academy's varsity athletic program included overseeing the production and national airing of a one-hour documentary on the history of Navy football, "Anchors Aweigh for Honor and Glory," produced by NFL Films, which aired on CBS to critical acclaim.

Previously, Lengyel gained national recognition as associate athletics director at the University of Louisville and the University of Missouri, and was director of athletics at Fresno State University and the University of Missouri. He has served as a head coach in football, lacrosse, baseball, wrestling and swimming, over his 16-year college coaching career.

Lengyel arrived at Marshall University in 1971, a few months after the November 1970 tragedy, and is credited with rebuilding the football program while restoring its four-year class structure. He left Marshall after the 1974 season.

In addition to his successful coaching career, Lengyel has also served in a number of administrative capacities throughout the college community. He is a former president of the National Association of College Directors of Athletics (NACDA) and currently serves on its Executive Committee. He received the prestigious James J. Corbett Award from NACDA and the Homer Rice Award from the Division 1A Directors of Athletics for a distinguished career and contributions to college athletics. He has also received the National Football Foundation's Outstanding Contribution to Amateur Football Award in 1997, and the John Toner Award for superior administrative abilities and outstanding dedication to college football. An NFF Executive Committee and Board member, Lengyel is the chairman of the Divisional Honors Court, which annually selects the College Football Hall of Fame Divisional Class. Additionally, he has received honorary degrees from the Sports Management Institute (SMI) and the United States Sports Academy.

Since his retirement at Navy, Lengyel has served as interim director of athletics at Temple University, Eastern Kentucky University and the University of Colorado.

W. A. “RED” DAWSON (Technical Advisor) served as Marshall University’s defensive football coach, working with the late Rick Tolley, into the 1970 season. He then served as quarterback receiver coach with Tolley’s successor, Jack Lengyel, the following season, his final year at Marshall.

Dawson had a stellar football career while playing at Florida State University. He was elected to the Seminoles’ Hall of Fame and earned All-American honorable mention honors at FSU before professional stints with the AFL’s Boston Patriots and Orlando Panthers.

After resigning his post as a Marshall assistant coach following the 1971 season, Dawson started his own construction company in Huntington, where he still resides.