

The New Dominion

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Brad and Kent Williamson

Rebels with a cause

Filmmakers explore role of faith in society in 'Rebellion of Thought'

Kent Williamson is nothing if not passionate.

That begins to explain his five-and-a-half-year odyssey that resulted in "Rebellion of Thought," a documentary written and directed by Kent Williamson and his brother, Brad Williamson, that explores the role of faith in our postmodern culture.

"The things that you're passionate about, I guess you have to find a way to be able to make them happen," said Kent Williamson, who founded the Charlottesville-based Paladin Pictures in 1991.

Williamson similarly willed Paladin into happening. His first job out of college in 1989 was at a small television station in Upstate Wisconsin.

"From there, I hopped around to different television stations doing production

for different TV stations. And then I finally decided that I wanted to get out of the broadcasting aspect of it and into the production aspect of it," Williamson said.

Williamson moved to Virginia in 1993 to work on a master's degree in screenwriting at UVa. In 1995, he got a job in the production department at the University - and worked there for seven years.

"I was laying the groundwork for Paladin all along. I'd save up my vacation time and go to work on a Paladin project. Or I'd get a client on the side - and I had a home-editing system, so I'd be able to edit things at home for different clients that I had," Williamson said.

"The whole time I was there, I knew it wasn't going to be a permanent thing. Seven years was a lot longer than I thought

I was going to be there when I got hired - but with five kids, it took me a while to kind of reach that critical mass where I knew I could support the family and was comfortable making the jump," Williamson said.

To give himself the time and money to do feature films like "Rebellion of Thought," Williamson pays the bills by building up Paladin's corporate-, industrial- and education-video client base.

"Our real expertise is in the educational realm," Williamson said. "We do a lot of different educational films and DVDs and things of that nature - everything from a business organization may need to train people, to also we do a lot of hands-on work in classrooms where we're working with teachers and students.

"We travel all over the country and film

in different school systems around the country for some of our larger clients that we have. Within the last couple of years, we've filmed from Upstate New York and Maine to Salt Lake City and Los Angeles and South Carolina and Kentucky and a half-dozen others in between. That's the bread-and-butter-type work that we do as a company."

A portion of that bread and butter has gone into the making of "Rebellion of Thought" - which debuted at the 2006 Virginia Film Festival to rave reviews.

Williamson admits that neither he nor his brother had any idea that it would take them as long as it did to get a completed film out of their work at the outset of the project.

"The project started with a conversation that I had with a writer friend of mine.

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He was the one who said, Hey, you might think about making a film on postmodernism. And I'm thinking, Postmodernism - what are you talking about? And he said, This is kind of how things impact our culture, and our culture seems to be changing, and why don't you learn something about it? I think there's a story there," Williamson said.

"I started doing some reading and started to trying to figure out what this is and what it means - and really, we're glad we spent five years on this film. Because if we would have done it in nine months or a year or something like that, it wouldn't have been the film that it turned into," Williamson said.

The Brothers Williamson sought out philosophers and theologians from across the country and across the ideological

it really evolved over the process - and I think it's a much stronger film as a result of that, because it has a personal connection now in the film. It's not just, Listen to what these experts have to say. But you see my brother and I struggling - because we have a lot more questions than we have answers," Williamson said.

"The film is a journey film - it's a road movie in so many ways. And it's set up that way," Williamson said. "We interviewed people all over the country - and we did a lot of filming along the way. We did all these man-on-the-street interviews in different locations. And we found that the journey continues - when the film ends, the story's not over. It's one that we're still trying to sort out. And I think that conveys pretty well in the film - and I think that's one of the things that connects with the

"What is this thing called postmodernism, how does it impact our culture, what does it mean, how does it impact specifically the role of the church, and how does it impact faith?"

spectrum to work toward an answer to their big question - "What is this thing called postmodernism, how does it impact our culture, what does it mean, how does it impact specifically the role of the church, and how does it impact faith?"

As they talked with more and more people, "We found that we were being changed as a result of what we were learning here," Williamson said.

"What we found about halfway through was that that we had set out to make a film about postmodernism, but we ended up being in the film about postmodernism and about the role of our faith and the role of the church in a postmodern culture. So

audience.

"It's not just a nice neatly-wrapped-up presentation on postmodernism - it really begs the viewer to get involved in the questions and dialogue that's taking place with it as we collectively as a culture try to struggle through it," Williamson said.

The brothers had to work feverishly to get the movie ready for the '06 Virginia Film Festival - to which they were invited by festival director Richard Herskowitz, who had chosen as the theme for the event "Finding God at the Movies."

"The two months leading up to the festival were a nonstop push to get the film done," Williamson said. "We worked

18-hour days the entire week prior to the screening - this is me, my brother and a team of three editors. The night before was an all-nighter. I got 45 minutes of sleep on the editing-room floor. Got up, we were able to dump the film to tape at 12:15 for a screening at 4:30. So it was rush-rush-rush just to get to that point."

The fatigue thus engendered didn't take anything off the nerves that the brothers felt during their sold-out screening.

"You're sitting there, kind of anxious the whole time," Williamson said. "The film finally wraps up, the credits roll - and it's dead silence. Nobody moves, nobody says a word. Nobody gets up to go to the exit. They sit there while the credits roll. And the credits finally end, and our logo appears at the tail end of the film, and the lights come up - and people just sit there.

It was kind of an eerie feeling - you don't know what to expect.

"The amount of questions and the amount of dialogue that took place after the screening - my brother and I were there for at least an hour fielding questions from people, and people came up after the Q-and-A was over with, and we just stood and talked with people for at least an hour - I think it was pretty well-received," Williamson said.

"That's the kind of thing that says to me that people are hungry for this kind of a conversation. People haven't been given the opportunity in a public way to talk about these things. And from my perspective, they're saying, Hey, it's about time that we have these conversations," Williamson said.

- Chris Graham

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