

Fireproof Producers Say Stakes Are Higher for New Film

As they shoot the follow up to their surprise hit film, the makers of Christian drama *Fireproof* know that the pressure is on.

Currently being filmed in Albany, Ga., *Courageous* is a bigger effort in every way than the previous church-made movie that was the most successful independent release of any in 2008, grossing more than \$30 million at the box office and credited with saving and strengthening many marriages.

The ensemble drama has more demanding scenes, double the previous \$500,000 budget and higher production standards. And with heightened expectations for the film when it opens in theaters next year, the church's Sherwood Pictures group also has stepped up the focus on an integral part of its productions' prayer.

"We are definitely feeling that the stakes are higher," said *Courageous* producer and co-writer Stephen Kendrick, who scripted the film with his brother, Alex. Both men are on staff at Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, whose earlier inspirational films were *Flywheel* and *Facing the Giants*.

In addition to daily on-set devotions, a 24-hour prayer chain based at the church throughout the seven-week shoot, and regular prayer requests and praise reports shared with more than 250,000 *Courageous* fans on Facebook, the film has a team devoted to prayer at each location.

Adapting a movie industry tradition of playfully clipping crew members' clothes with wooden pegs—a vital on-set accessory—when they are not aware, the "hostess" team of women

marks the pegs with Scripture verses to remind those working on the set that they are being prayed for.

The prayer emphasis flows from the heart of the church, which features a two-story prayer tower outside its main entrance—from which up to 1,000 cards are sent each week to people who have been prayed for—and a prayer room below the pulpit where intercessors meet during each service.

“We don’t want to spend two years making a movie that is just a good idea,” said Kendrick, crediting prayer with bringing the fathering theme of *Courageous*, which follows a group of law enforcement officers dealing with challenges in their own families. “The Lord knows what this generation needs to hear and when they need to hear it.”

Members of the church see the success of Sherwood Pictures over the last few years as an answer to their ongoing prayers that their congregation might touch the world from their small corner.

The success of *Fireproof* and the other films has drawn visitors from across the U.S. and even overseas curious to know more about the church that has taken on Hollywood. There have even been commercial coach tours of the city, showing tourists some of the different locations used in the movies.

But “it would be sad to me if all we were known for [was movies],” said Senior Pastor Michael Catt. “Making movies is just a portion of what we do.”

Some of the proceeds from Sherwood films have gone toward church ministries, including the development of an 82-acre sports park for use by the local community.