STEVEN SCAFFIDI FORMED MISSION MEDIA PRODUCTIONS TO PRODUCE HIGH QUALITY AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING FILMS, TELEVISION AND OTHER CREATIVE PROJECTS THAT INSPIRE.

S teven Scaffidi has been in the production business for 30 years, writing, directing and producing films and commercials for his company, Ghost Rider Pictures. His vast catalogue of work over the years has garnered national attention and accolades, but his latest venture, Mission Media Productions, means more to him than any award ever could.

Mission Media is a production company based at the New Orleans Mission, the largest faith-based private service provider to the homeless population of New Orleans. The company gives these homeless men and women, called Mission Disciples, the opportunity to work on actual films and other creative projects, and to learn all aspects of film production.

The idea to form Mission Media Productions was conceived late last year. Scaffidi was producing a music series/fundraiser at the New Orleans Mission, where he met and collaborated with an audience of more than 100 homeless men and women to write a song, “Hard Times Don’t Hit Me No More” (which would later be considered for a Grammy). After meeting many incredible people and learning their stories, Scaffidi knew that he wanted to become more involved with the Mission.

“When I came to the Mission, I got to meet people that I never really met before,” says Scaffidi. “I saw a whole different side of life, and I really liked what I saw.”

He had the idea to start a full-fledged production company at the Mission, and brought the idea to Mission Director
David Bottner.

“I told David I could envision a production company here,” explains Scaffidi. “They had a video department when I walked in the door, and I said with a little guidance this could go a long, long way. They had talent to begin with—people that loved shooting and editing and being part of the creative process. My idea was to take it to the next level and come up with some real projects that the Mission could own. I brought the same skill set that I use in my production company to the Mission.”

Mission Media’s first production project came about thanks to what Scaffidi calls a “genius idea.” On November 11, Veterans Day, the Mission hosted a gala honoring New Orleans veterans. The gala featured a silent auction, with proceeds benefiting the Mission facility’s renovation. Two days before the event, Scaffidi came up with the idea to auction off a documentary that Mission Media would produce.

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“David said, ‘Who’s going to bid on something that doesn’t exist?’” recalls Scaffidi. “But they did, and we were in business!”

The winning bidder was Earl Heard of BIC Media, who was looking to make a DVD companion to the book Rock Bottom and Back. Mission Disciples made up the entire production crew.

“I had to force myself not to edit, not to shoot,” says Scaffidi, recalling Mission Media’s first project. “I’ve learned to back away more and more. When I first started, I was hands-on a lot. But I can honestly say I’ve never edited anything at Mission Media. How are you going to be authentic with us claiming we’re giving back when I’m doing all the work?”

As far as training, Scaffidi will demonstrate different lighting or camera techniques and give advice based on experience, but mostly, the crew learns by doing. “As they grow and as they get better, they’re given more opportunities and given more freedom to do things,” he explains.

He continues, “Our crew is really talented. Our editor, Devin Black, when I met him he had been at the Mission just a few months after living under a bridge. That’s the phenomenal story right there. It gives me joy.”

Currently, Scaffidi and a crew of Mission Disciples are working on Desperate Reality, a radio show on WWL where homeless people are rescued live on the air. The Mission Media team is shooting episodes for a potential television series.

“We have two camera crews on the street, journeying into the city,” explains Scaffidi. “We rescued two people off Bourbon Street last weekend live on the radio. Johnny Lonardo, the host, talks to them, prays with him, and we’re filming the whole time.”

He continues, “My goal is to create creative content through the Mission staffed by Mission Disciples, every
one of whom were at one time homeless or hurting—drugs, prison, everything you can imagine—and that’s our crew, that’s our staff. So when we’re out ministering to people, the guys behind the camera and the crew, they have been there. I’ve never been there. So it’s a completely different dynamic when someone comes up and says, ‘I’ve been there.’ That’s what I think is amazing.

“My other goal is for our crew of Mission Disciples to get paid so they can become productive citizens—that’s the re-engagement side of things. Our staff is getting paid bonuses on every production we get hired for and we are buying new equipment to grow our department.”

Scaffidi has no shortage of goals for Mission Media Productions, but he says he has no grand plan, “other than to push a little more every day.”

“So far we’ve written original music, been considered for a Grammy, we have a TV series in production, we worked on Rock Bottom and Back. And we have other projects in the works,” he says. “We’re not hitting singles, we’re hitting grand slams. That’s the scary part. Should we hunt every now and then? No, we’re aiming for the fences.”

Mission Media Productions had its official public launch on August 18 at the Rock Bottom and Back premiere party at the Prytania Theatre, and the phone is already ringing off the hook with potential projects. But Scaffidi wants to be selective.

“I don’t want to overwhelm my guys just to be busy,” he explains. “When I first started Ghost Rider, I took everything. I don’t want to do that here. I’m looking for great projects, not just any project. For example, we just completed a job with Iberia Bank and we are now working on multiple projects with Troy Duhon, owner of Premiere Automotive and Executive Producer of God’s Not Dead.”

He continues, “There’s a fine line between doing projects for money and doing things that uplift. The latter is much more rewarding. I want to be able to look back and say I was able to make a contribution, make an impact. I want these people to be successful and to inspire others. I want the guy under the bridge to see one of our guys and that inspires him to get out from under the bridge. Then I feel like I’ve accomplished something.”

Scaffidi pauses, then adds with a chuckle: “And winning an Academy Award would be nice!”

“But in all seriousness, I’ve been in the business a long time and over the years I’ve learned a lot of things that have made me a better filmmaker. Most importantly, I’m letting God drive the bus and I’m happy to ride shotgun. He’s a much better producer than I am and He’s taught me more than I ever learned in film school.”