

NMSU's Creative Media Institute goes beyond entertainment

A tiny pill is silently dropped into a red plastic cup at a nondescript party. The liquid transitions red, and the drugged drink is passed to a faceless young woman who cries out before a dark room.

In this opening scene of the award winning public service announcement, created for the Las Cruces La Pinon Sexual Recovery Center by New Mexico State University's Creative Media Institute, color is used to stimulate audience interest.

"We gave it a black and white look, so that when it's on TV, it captures your attention," said Kyle Karges, CMI student and the film's co-producer. "And then, when you see that element of red in the video, all of a sudden you kind of really, quickly just know something is wrong."

CMI is using the skill and creativity of movie-making techniques to make difference.

The video, which won the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's 2013 Visionary Voice Award in May, features five vignettes portraying the primary message that perpetrators of sexual violence are often known to the victim, and bystanders often have the opportunity and ability to stop the violence before it occurs. The award-winning public service announcement is just one of several CMI projects designed to give back to a community that makes it all possible.

"Virtually everybody is doing something, or has done something,

because we have the apparatus the other departments don't have," said Mark Medoff, Tony Award-winning playwright, Oscar-nominated screenwriter, award-winning film director and distinguished achievement professor in the College of Arts and Sciences. "We have the ability to make what is the medium of the hour - film and video, things to put on social media, YouTube, theaters

and television."

CMI is involved in a number of other community outreach efforts. For example, a series of training films designed to educate New Mexico law enforcement officers about child safety. The compelling films were a collaborative effort in association with the Southwest Institute for Family & Child Advocacy and other agencies.

The first film in the series, "Ensuring Child Safety: Upon Parental Arrest," recently received three awards - Telly Awards' Bronze Medal, the Accolade Award of Merit and the Communicator Award of Distinction.

Directed by Mitch Fowler, assistant professor of digital media at CMI, this video focuses on tips and procedures for law enforcement officers when interacting with children during a parental arrest scenario. Sherwin Lau, assistant professor at CMI, produced all three of the child safety videos and wore several hats for each film including director, additional editor, colorist and sound designer. The video can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/50412092>.

"Making these training videos has been very rewarding," Fowler said. "One of NMSU's central tenets is service, and this opportunity was a great one for us to do something that will hopefully help the community. We're excited about the prestige the videos and awards bring to CMI, SWIFCA and NMSU, and for our students who worked on the videos to share the award with us."

Fowler is currently working on a second series of videos designed to help elementary and middle school teachers assess when abuse or neglect may be occurring in their students' homes.

Lau produced an award-winning project as part of a series for a local pregnancy crisis center that provides counseling and basic medical services. The public service announcement for Turning Point of Las Cruces won a 2013 Telly Award. It can be seen at <http://vimeo.com/53946999>.

"The project was written and directed by my wife, Monica and me," Lau said. "We wanted to show different women from different circumstances all facing the same situation."

The second one in that series was a promotional video for the organization's annual fundraiser. The video is a compilation of anecdotes from women who found help at the organization.

Lau presently serves as the director of visual media for Community Sports Associate, a nonprofit organization, where he creates all video content to document and promote the organization's people and events.

"Being able to use my skills as a filmmaker, to create films that support people and organizations focused on serving the people of our community here and around the world, is the main reason I am a filmmaker," Lau said.

"The faculty clearly has this sense that this is just part of being a citizen in this community," said James Maupin, CMI department head.

A series of six ethics videos, commissioned by the state of New Mexico and the Daniels Foundation, are also in the works at CMI. The films will be distributed online to all state employees with the intention of delivering them to employees in Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Arizona and Texas.

Phillip Lewis, professor of digital media and the film's producer, writer and co-director, was named a Daniels Fellow for the project and recently finished the first film.

"I designed an interactive video environment that challenged viewers to answer questions about behaviors they saw in a series of videos," Lewis said. "I presented it to them, and it turned out they liked the idea."

The project is in collaboration with Bruce Huhmann, associate professor in the College of Business, and CMI alumni Oscar Zamora and Sam Sandoval, who worked with Lewis on a previous project. Sandoval is co-directing with Lewis,

and the second film in the series will be shot in September.

Lewis is also working on a video for the Bureau of Land Management about the Trackways National Monument, titled "Paleontology for 3rd Graders." And this summer, he will travel to Africa for a documentary about African women working in agriculture. The feature-length documentary will span three continents and more than 10 countries.

"These are significant projects that have been put together with faculty in a department where there were 334 majors this spring," Maupin said. "For them to be able to carve time out to engage that sort of thing is pretty phenomenal, especially when outreach is not an expectation of performance. They do this because they feel it's important and they love making movies."

Karges has filed the La Pinon public service announcement in his portfolio and is currently working on a new project titled, "31 States." The name refers to the 31 states in the U.S. that allow rapists the right to sue for parental custody of a child conceived by rape. So far, he has interviewed 10 women, and is concentrating on a story about a victim from Missouri. For more information about the project visit the project's Facebook page at <https://facebook.com/31States>.

"I guess I was really naive in thinking that everybody is a good person," Karges said. "You start to look at what society is, and what we're allowing society to do, and that really inspired me."

Written by Medoff, along with his wife, Stephanie Medoff and CMI professor and screenwriter Amy Lanasa, the La Pinon film portrays bystanders interrupting child sexual abuse. Medoff refers to them as his heroes. The heroes interrupt the abuse by an uncle, a coach and a neighbor. The opening scene shows one stopping the abuse at a party.

"The hero is somebody who does something for others despite the fact that it might not serve him or her, so I think that's the way we have to think about public service, that it's not so much an obligation or some burden, some duty,

but just something we should do," said Medoff, the film's director and co-producer. "We should try and help other people."

The video is showing on Comcast Cable, and has been made available nationwide. To view the video visit <http://vimeo.com/44544420>.

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