

ICTV Hits the Road with Reality Show

By Mike Levy

Some people will go to great lengths for their art. In the case of one Ithaca College-based television show, it happened to be 700 miles. That was the total distance traveled by 12 subjects and 50 crewmembers as they circumnavigated central New York, shooting in 40 locations over five days — and earning two speeding tickets — all to create a reality program aptly called “The Race.”

The ICTV show is modeled after CBS’ “The Amazing Race.” Six teams travel around the state, beginning at Ithaca College and weaving a twisted route that includes regional landmarks. Along the way, team members are given challenges and short tasks they must complete before getting back on the road. The slowest team is eliminated at the end of each episode, with the final three teams battling to the final finish line in episode four, which airs Monday, March 5, on ICTV.

All the elements of authentic reality programming are here. From the quick-paced editing and adrenaline-inducing musical overdubs, to dramatic story arcs, “The Race” is compelling, effortless entertainment in the very best sense.

“‘The Amazing Race’ is a much bigger production, obviously,” says ICTV producer Peter Berg. “Basically, the format is the same, going from place to place, reading clues, doing challenges.” While CBS uses the entire globe as a stage, Berg’s show focuses on central New York. “We tried to create a big production value without actually paying for anything,” he says. “We stayed at churches for free. All the challenges were donated by the sponsors, the people who hosted them.”

In episode one, for example, one member of each team had to eat a “garbage plate,” a legendary dish at the Rochester restaurant Nick Tahou Hots. Berg was impressed with the generosity he encountered in lining up locations for the show’s many challenges. “We got very few rejections from the places we called,” he says.

Episode three, which airs Feb. 26, prominently features nearby Binghamton. “The teams had to



Jeff Taylor (left) and Matt Perna, contestants in “The Race,” examine a clue at Letchworth State Park during filming of the television show that is produced at Ithaca College.

ride the carousel in Recreation Park and then find five more carousels in the ‘Carousel Capitol of the World,’” says Berg. “At each carousel they had to pull a ribbon off of a sign that we posted in front of the carousel.” Contestants also had to visit with a famous barnyard animal. “The clue is very vague,” says Berg. “It says to find the big pig in nearby Hubbardsville. They get to the town and they have to figure out that he’s the world’s biggest pig, and they have to find out where he lives.”

Episode four will bring the three remaining teams back to Ithaca for the grand finale, which will be followed by a “reunion” episode with all contestants.

Berg says he has been watching reality shows all his life (two of his favorites are “Survivor” and “The Mole”) and always wanted to create one of his own. “When I was in high school, I coordinated a few events. We rented out an island in the middle of the Susquehanna River,” he recalls. “Teams came together and we played ‘Survivor’ for the weekend.” None of these events involved cameras, says Berg, but the experience gave him the know-how to coordinate “The Race.” Add four years at Ithaca College’s Park School to his resume, and he was ready to make the show a reality.

“Surprisingly, I didn’t have a hard time finding cast and crew,”

says Berg. “I had a 50-person crew in the end.” Casting was an intricate process. “We put up flyers all over the campus and used word of mouth. We recruited some teams that we thought would make for some interesting characters on TV.” Berg and his crew then conducted 15-minute interviews with 30 teams of finalists. In this way they were able to find teams — like Joel and Jefferson, the first to be eliminated in episode one — who might be fun to watch on television.

“Those two guys were priceless,” says Berg. “We knew they weren’t going to do too well in the race, but we also knew they would be hilarious.”

While Berg is proud of his work,

he can’t claim to have had a fun time during shooting. “For me it was really stressful,” he says. “I would stay up all night working on pre-production and getting everything lined up for the next day. The crew kept on telling me it was one of the funnest shoots they’ve ever been on. The thing is, the crew is in the race as well.”

Another daunting task faced Berg and company after filming, with more than 100 hours of footage to cull for the finished product. Each episode derives from about 30 hours of footage, which translates into 250 to 300 gigabytes of data (Berg has six different hard drives devoted to the project). While working on the final episodes, Berg says he’s had trouble keeping them under one hour. Still, despite all the work, there will be little rest for him when he’s finished.

“We’re doing a second season,” Berg says. “It’s on a smaller scale so we can get it edited by the end of the semester. We’re going to try something new this time around — rapid fire eliminations, switching the teams, some crazy things like that.” The second season will be a two-night mini-series, filmed in March and broadcast near the end of April.

Episode three of “The Race” can be seen on Time Warner Cable channel 16 on Monday, Feb. 26, at 10 p.m. The final episode will air a week later at 9 p.m., followed by the reunion show. Both shows will be streamed live at www.ictv.org/show/Race, and both will be available for viewing following the original broadcasts.



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