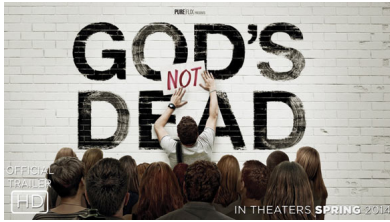


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The producer of "God's Not Dead" is a 1988 graduate of Meade High School – David A. R. White. David is the son of Rev. and Mrs. Gene White, who was pastor of the Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Meade during the 1980s. The movie stars Shane Harper as the lead character. Along with David White, who plays a pastor, the movie features stars such as Kevin Sorbo of TV's "Hercules," Dean Cain of TV's "Superman," Willie and Korie Robertson of "Duck Dynasty," and the Contemporary Christian Music Group – Newsboys. Courtesy photo

"God's Not Dead" grossed \$9,244,641 in its first weekend

By TOM HUHNS

- Meade County News

The faith-based movie "God's Not Dead" opened in theaters this past weekend and is grabbing the attention of the entertainment world.

Although the film showed on only one-fourth the number of screens that most Hollywood productions open with, it ranked as the No. 4 top selling movie of the weekend.

The movie is the story of a Christian college student whose faith is challenged by an atheist professor.

The producer of the film is a 1988 graduate of Meade High School – David A. R. White. David is the son of Rev. and Mrs. Gene White, who was pastor of the Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Meade during the 1980s.

"I love Meade, it's where I'm from," David said in a telephone interview this past Monday. "We moved there when I was in seventh grade. So I went to high school there and moved on."



"I think my parents were there for eight years," he added.

It was while he was living in Meade that David said he developed an interest in making movies.

"I had an inkling to go into the entertainment industry at an early age," he stated. "I had it in high school, and I never really told anybody."

Actually, White said he had shared his secret ambition with one trusted teacher, librarian

Debbie Thomas.

"She's the only one I ever told in high school that I wanted to go into the entertainment industry. She was very supportive of that," he said.

Although he had an idea with what he wanted to do in life, as a high school student in Meade, David White was facing some incredible challenges for a would-be moviemaker.

"I didn't see any movies growing up," he said. "I know that some people in our town did, they would go to Dodge and all that stuff, but I never did that."

And while he said he admired his high school music teacher, the academic structure of Meade High School back then did not exactly foster his ambition.

"There was not really much outlet for me at that time," he added. "With Carol Unruh, we did get a musical like every other year, so we really didn't have a drama program."

Once he graduated high school, David said he followed his family's traditional education path and entered the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

"My entire family had gone there and had graduated, and met their significant others," he said of Moody. "My mom and dad met there and graduated, my brother and sister both met their wife and husband there as well."

"I went to Moody for a year and felt like I wanted to pursue this thing that was in my heart," he added.

After his freshman year of college, David said he called his parents to break the news to them

that he had other plans.

"I said, 'Dad, I want to leave Bible school, and I want to go to Hollywood and be an actor.'"

"I think my parents were exceptionally shocked to say the least," he said.

So at the age of 19, White moved to Los Angeles to fulfill his dream. Within six months he had landed a recurring role on the TV sitcom "Evening Shade" starring Burt Reynolds.

"I was the best friend of Burt's son on there," he said of his role. "It was recurring so I wasn't on every week." Still, David stayed with the show for three years.

"And then the Lord opened up an opportunity to go into the Christian film industry," he added.

In 1992, David was given the lead role in a movie called Second Glance.

"I pretty much started doing these Christian films every year after that," he said.

White admitted at the time he was not really looking to get into the Christian film genre.

"It was super unpopular back then," he said. "I didn't really want to be in it either. I kept asking the Lord to let me go back to another television show or something else."

But the presence of the Christian film industry persisted in David's life, and he started to learn another aspect of the entertainment business.

"There was probably one or two, or maybe three, Christian films being made every year at that point," he said. "I knew the marketplace because I started to do them for all the large organizations like Youth for Christ, Concerned Women for America and Focus on the Family."

During those years, he also continued his TV acting career with appearances on other hit TV shows such as "Coach," "Saved by the Bell," "Sisters" and "Melrose Place."

In 1999, David produced his first Christian movie.

"It was a little movie we made for \$87,000 that friends and family raised," he said. "This little movie's gone on and it's probably grossed over \$3 million to this date."

"From then on, I started producing one a year," he said of Christian movies.

In 2005, David and three other partners started a production company called "Pure Flix."

"We're at about 100 films deep now in our library," he noted.

White said the company sought the advice of church leaders when they began production of "God's Not Dead."

"A lot of churches around the country use our films at church movie night, basically," he said. "We reached out to a lot of those pastors and asked them what they wanted to see us do"

"A lot of them said 'do a movie about apologetics,' basically what it is that you believe."

That suggestion got the ball rolling.

"We started looking into all these different court cases with colleges and discrimination going on at all the different universities," David said. "We wanted to bring that into the movie, and then we made all the different elements."

David said the story line of "God's Not Dead" fits the bill completely. In the movie, a Christian college student is challenged by his atheist professor to successfully argue the case for his beliefs – or fail the class.

The movie stars Shane Harper as the lead character. Along with David White, who plays a pastor, the movie features stars such as Kevin Sorbo of TV's "Hercules," Dean Cain of TV's "Superman," Willie and Korie Robertson of "Duck Dynasty," and the Contemporary Christian Music Group – Newsboys.

After its opening weekend, "God's Not Dead" is proving not only to be popular with Christian audiences, but a commercial success as well.

"We were only in 780 screens versus the 3,000-plus for everything else that Hollywood put out this weekend, and we were number four," White said. "It's unprecedented. We had the second highest per-screen average, only after Divergent, this past weekend."

White pointed out that during its opening weekend, the movie "God's Not Dead" brought in about \$12,000 per screen that showed it.

"It's the highest per-screen opening of any Christian movie ever," he added. "It beat out 'Courageous,' 'Fireproof' and 'Son of God.'"

In acknowledging the success of "God's Not Dead," David said he's been surprised by the reaction of the entertainment industry.

"I just did an interview with Entertainment Weekly this morning, and I'm going to talk with the Associated Press a little later. Everybody wants a story on this.

"I've been in the Christian Film Industry since 1992," he said. "I'm so blessed and humbled, and it's funny for all of a sudden Hollywood and the world to kind of take notice."

And in spite of his career efforts for the past 22 years, David was quick to acknowledge the real reason for the success for "God's Not Dead."

"I credit God's favor and God's grace on this movie," he added. "All praise be to God on this one, I'm just happy to be along for the ride."

EDITOR'S NOTE: "God's Not Dead" grossed \$9,244,641 in its first weekend, according to The Movie Times ranking site (<http://www.the-movie-times.com/thrsdir/TopTen.mv>).

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