



Steve Talley and Academy Award Nominee Eric Roberts star in "Deadline"



Curt Hahn & Hunter Atkins

"Deadline"

Nashville, TN

Members Since: 2005

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"I had no intention of getting into the film business," confesses Hunter Atkins, former CEO and now chairman of the Bank of Nashville. Yet, among his many diverse undertakings, Atkins can now list Executive Producer for "Deadline," an independent film released this year about the murder of a young African-American in rural Alabama that went uninvestigated for almost 20 years.

"It was no different than any other TAB meeting," he says. Except that day fellow Board member Curt Hahn, whose company Film House had a successful track record that included T.V. commercials and two feature films, told the Board about a script he wanted to produce. "It was the fall of 2010," recalls Dick Wallace, the Board's facilitator. Hahn had personal commitments that made him want to push production of the movie out until 2012. Everyone on the Board encouraged him to do it sooner and not to wait. "I think that encouragement was instrumental in pushing Curt over the top," says Wallace.

The other problem was that the recession was in full swing and investors were hard to come by, especially for the type of feel-good, based-on-a-true-story movie Hahn wanted to make. He had not come to the meeting that day looking for investors – in fact, he told the board he was willing to put his life savings into the project. Atkins, after giving it a little thought, offered to be a 50/50 partner. "Curt asked me to read the script and said that if I was still interested, we could talk," Atkins recalls.

Based on the novel "Grievances" by Mark Ethridge, "Deadline" tells the story of two journalists who, inspired by a young socialite's interest in the case, investigate a racially-motivated killing.

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TAB facilitator Dick Wallace, Hunter Atkins and Curt Hahn



The reporters, played by Steve Talley and Eric Roberts, prevail in uncovering the truth despite opposition, violent threats and personal loss.

Atkins not only liked the script, but had ideas about how to improve it. “That’s what you get with someone who takes a minor in English while majoring in business at Vanderbilt,” he admits. “Plus I was familiar with the settings in the script.” After a little convincing, Hahn agreed to take on a partner and the two set out to make a movie.

Of course, it takes many people to make a movie. Atkins had the opportunity to see the entire process up close, from auditioning actors and hiring crew to scouting locations and shooting. “At 61 years old, I feel like I spent two years in graduate film school,” he says.

Other members of TAB got involved in the process as well. Several Board members, including Atkins, were extras in the film. Says Board facilitator Dick Wallace, “We got to see how a movie is made, see the sequence of events, and how difficult it is.”

Hahn often looked to the Board for input, especially when shooting wrapped and he began seeking ideas for low budget marketing. “The plan for releasing the movie was refined through TAB,” he says. Their unique approach resulted in Hahn – along with Ethridge, a few cast members, and Atkins more often than not – taking a coach tour to 46 cities to premiere the movie. The “red carpet premiere” strategy caught the attention of local media. Newspapers like The Chicago Sun-Times, Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Miami Herald jumped at the chance to host “Deadline” premieres that, in addition to telling a compelling civil rights story, championed the cause of investigative journalism.

“If a local journalist doesn’t investigate something like this, who is going to do it?” Atkins poses. “Yahoo isn’t going to do it. Fox News isn’t going to go to a small town and spend months looking into something. It has to be the local newspaper, otherwise a good portion of the population goes unserved.”

Now “Deadline” is being released around the world, and is widely available at outlets like Amazon and Netflix and on Blu-Ray and DVD at www.DeadlineFilm.com. And what of the investment Atkins made in the film? “If we get all our money back, I will be glad to do another one and I will become a film guy. If we don’t I will write it off as the most expensive hobby I’ve ever tried,” he jokes.

Fortunately, Atkins views the endeavor as a learning experience. “TAB is a learning experience for everybody there. Not only do you learn how to make your own business better, it’s also an introductory course to every other business type and style that’s around the table. That’s what I’ve enjoyed most about it – looking behind the curtain at other businesses. TAB affords curious people like me the opportunity to do that.”

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