



FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

—Production Information—

As darkness descends over the flatlands of West Texas every Friday from September through December, a dazzling, disorienting glow, visible on the stark horizon for miles around, ignites the blackened sky. Looming over the landscape, Ratliff Stadium, the country's biggest high school football field, overflows with 20,000 spectators, their voices raised in the trademark chant: "MO-JO! MO-JO! MO-JO!"

The crowd's jubilation rises to fever pitch as the Permian Panthers, Odessa's "boys in black," take to the field like warriors in an ancient coliseum. Once a week during the fall, this town and its dreams are carried on the padded shoulders of these young gridiron heroes, illuminated beneath the autumnal glare of those Friday night lights that serve as a beacon of hope to the townsfolk of this dusty West Texas town.

Since their first season in 1959, the Panthers established themselves as the most successful football program not only in Texas, but in the entire country. Now, in the last days of summer of 1988, the Permian High School Panthers of Odessa, Texas begin the season with one thing on their minds—winning their fifth state championship in their 30-year history.

For their coach, Gary Gaines (Oscar® winner BILLY BOB THORNTON), it all comes down to his definition of perfection: "Being perfect is about being able to look

your friends in the eye and know that you didn't let them down. I want you to put each other in your hearts forever—because forever is about to happen. Can you live in that moment as best you can, with clear eyes, with love and joy in your heart? If you can do that, then you're perfect.”

Friday Night Lights is the true American story of a group of young athletes, their town and their dreams.

Produced by Imagine Entertainment's Academy Award®-winning producer BRIAN GRAZER (*8 Mile, A Beautiful Mind, Apollo 13*) for Universal Pictures, *Friday Night Lights* is the big-screen adaptation of H.G. Bissinger's acclaimed book *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team and a Dream*, his vivid account of this small West Texas town and its devotion to its high school football team. The story has been hailed by *Sports Illustrated* as one of the top five greatest sports stories of all time.

Friday Night Lights is directed by PETER BERG (*The Rundown, Very Bad Things*) and stars Oscar® winner Billy Bob Thornton (*Sling Blade, The Man Who Wasn't There, Bad Santa*), who heads the film's dynamic cast as Gary Gaines, the school's dedicated coach under intense pressure by school officials and Odessa's townsfolk to capture Permian's fifth state championship after failing to do so his first two seasons as coach.

Grammy-winning recording artist TIM MCGRAW, in his first Hollywood starring role, joins the cast as Charlie Billingsley, the former all-state Panther player who attempts to help his son avoid the life mistakes he himself made...but struggles with how.

Thornton's gridiron squad includes a group of dedicated players embodied by a cast of Hollywood's upcoming young stars, including DEREK LUKE (*Antwone Fisher, Pieces of April*) as Boobie Miles, the Panther's powerful running back whose dream of stardom on the college circuit is jeopardized by a serious knee injury; JAY HERNANDEZ (*The Rookie, crazy/beautiful*) as Brian Chavez, the brainy, brawny tight end who eyes a college education at Harvard; LUCAS BLACK (*Sling Blade, Cold Mountain*) as Mike Winchell, the uncertain, insecure quarterback cheered on by his chronically ill mother; GARRETT HEDLUND (*Troy*) as Don Billingsley, the cocky, self-destructive tailback at odds with his disheartened, overbearing father Charlie; and LEE THOMPSON YOUNG (Disney Channel's *The Famous Jett Jackson*) as Chris

Comer, the scrappy third-string running back who is granted a chance to join Gaines' starting lineup. Rounding out the team is film newcomer LEE JACKSON, a Texas native and former linebacker with the University of Texas Longhorns, who makes his professional acting debut as Ivory Christian, the gifted middle linebacker and the Panthers' spiritual leader whose cathartic pre-game ritual rouses his fellow teammates.

Marking his third motion picture assignment in the director's chair, filmmaker Peter Berg directs from a screenplay by DAVID AARON COHEN (*The Devil's Own*) and Berg, based on Bissinger's 1990 book. Imagine's JAMES WHITAKER (*8 Mile*) and JOHN CAMERON (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) serve as executive producers.

Berg's creative squad behind the cameras includes director of photography TOBIAS SCHLIESSLER (*The Rundown, Bait*), production designer SHARON SEYMOUR (*Bad Santa, The Cable Guy*), editor DAVID ROSENBLOOM (*The Insider, Primal Fear*) and costume designer SUSAN MATHESON (*Blue Crush, Honey*).

Veteran stunt coordinator and second-unit director ALLAN GRAF (*Any Given Sunday, The Waterboy*) coordinated the film's football action involving over 100 plays, spotlighting not only the principal cast, but a formidable team of 40 extras who complemented Permian's ranks and portrayed players on the story's opposing football teams.

THE DREAM...

"The book *Friday Night Lights* was something I had read very early on," remembers Oscar®-winning producer Brian Grazer. "The late, great director, Alan Pakula, introduced me to the book. Alan was going to direct the movie—since his death, I've stuck with the project for 14 years, waiting for the right timing and combination of talent to bring it to the screen, being respectful and mindful of what Alan would have brought to the film. I've been in love with the story since the beginning and committed to turning it into the kind of film it deserves to be."

Originally published in 1990, H.G. 'Buzz' Bissinger's book *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team and a Dream*, his chronicle of the 1988 Permian High School football season in Odessa, Texas, remained on *The New York Times* Best-seller List for 15 weeks, has since gone through several re-printings (currently in its 40th printing) and was named

by *Sports Illustrated* as one of greatest sports stories of all time and the best ever to be centered in the world of football.

Today, 14 years after publication, the book still sells at the rate of nearly 50,000 copies a year. *Friday Night Lights* has proven popular not only in high school football locker rooms, but also in hundreds of college classrooms, particularly studies in sociology.

“There are a handful of really great sports stories in this century, and I think this is one of them,” comments Grazer. “But what’s even more compelling than the sports element, I feel, is the revelation of the presence of this localized cultural phenomenon, this subculture, all across America, in small towns and in some pretty big ones as well. Attendance around these Friday night high school games takes on a religious aspect, a spiritual side—basically people going every Friday to church. And these young athletes are like rock stars in these towns and they have to carry all of the burdens that come with being famous role models who are looked to for that all-important win.”

“In the mid-‘80s, I remember driving out west, going through little towns in Alabama, Louisiana and Texas and seeing their high school football stadiums,” author Bissinger recounts. “They were always beautiful, always painted, and the fields were always being watered even if there was a drought. These places really are shrines, like temples, and my dream was to write this book. It wouldn’t leave my head until I found this town called Odessa. So, I quit my job and decided to go there.”

In depicting the 1988 season, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author, then an editor at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, uprooted his young family and spent a full year in Odessa after hearing about the locals’ allegiance to the Permian Panthers, long considered one of the greatest high school football programs in Texas.

“I wanted to recount the highs and lows of what it meant to be a high school football player in a town such as this,” Bissinger writes. “The idea of high school sports keeping a town together, keeping it alive, and the inevitable danger of adults living vicariously through their young, fascinated me. These kids held the town on their shoulders in a place where high school football went to the very core of life.”

“I heard about the legacy of Permian and Odessa,” the author reflects back during a visit to the set in Austin. “It was then the winningest team in Texas football history. Twenty-thousand people every Friday night! I had never seen anything like that, and I was a huge sports fan! As I wrote in the book, those lights become an addiction, a Friday night fix, if you live in a place like Odessa.

“I had been to NFL and AFL championships,” Bissinger continues, “but you get into Ratliff, that rocket ship of a stadium, on a Friday night and those lights go up with those crowds of people. It is so intoxicating and magnificent and intense. I have never seen a sporting event as exciting as that, because these were kids playing in the way we believe sports should be played. They played for their own honor, for their team and for their town, and it was really intoxicating.”

Bissinger spent one full year in Odessa, which encompassed the entire 1988 football season, from the initial summer training camp through the season finale in December and beyond, “becoming part of the community.” He then took the next six months “sorting out the book’s structure and the narrative—whom I was writing about and what games to really look at, what sociological themes to explore.

“I decided early on there were six kids that I really wanted to write about in depth,” he says. “I already had my narrative core, which was the season, a year full of unexpected surprises. I had no idea what kind of stories would unfold. If I was writing fiction, I could not have made up many of the things that happened. I don’t have the imagination. This was, professionally, the most exciting and memorable year of my life.”

The book struck a nerve in places as varied as Midwestern locker rooms and in conference rooms in Hollywood; when Grazer, working with Universal Pictures, acquired the movie rights to Bissinger’s tome, his goal was to create a film that “shows an America where values like pride, community and dedication are still cornerstones.

“We wanted to show that there are still places, entire towns, where people turn off their televisions, get out of their cars and come together for a common purpose,” Grazer stresses. “And that these communal rituals and rites are compelling and dramatic subjects to explore within a major motion picture. I’ve always been interested in different cultures and this film dramatizes this subculture as it did in the book. This subject grabbed me just as the hip-hop music culture did in *8 Mile*.”

Oscar® winner Grazer nurtured the project’s development ever since landing the film rights to Bissinger’s book upon its publication in late 1990, with Pakula attached to direct. (Sadly, the director unexpectedly died in 1998.) Grazer’s 14-year odyssey proved to be lucky for one of the industry’s most respected and successful filmmakers, who captured Hollywood’s highest honor, the Best Picture Academy Award®, for his 2001 drama, *A Beautiful Mind*. Grazer’s commitment to the story kept the project alive through its long road of development.

“I’m not so sure that what these kids went through in Odessa was all that different from my own adolescence in the San Fernando Valley,” Grazer contends. “Odessa’s values were those of America. This is a story about a period in boys’ lives where everything is being formed—that’s what I loved about this story. And in Odessa, the football arena just intensified it. Having been there and witnessed this phenomenon myself, I remember it was one of the most intense experiences I’ve ever had.”

“It’s really a movie about the obsession with high school football in Texas,” echoes star Billy Bob Thornton, who tackles the role of Gary Gaines, the committed, beleaguered real-life coach of the 1988 Panther season. “I grew up in Arkansas, and this mania also exists there. So it’s about this obsession with high school football and how it can bring a town together...or tear it apart.

“I grew up watching my dad as a high school basketball coach,” remembers Thornton. “When the Arkansas Razorbacks lost, my dad was in a bad mood for two or three weeks, and it affected the whole household. What’s also great about this story and Berg’s movie is that it’s not just about football. It deals with the actual people. So when you see the football games, you care about the people playing them, because you know who they are.”

Director Berg (coincidentally, Bissinger’s second cousin and a lifelong acquaintance of the author) was also obsessed with the project, closely monitoring its progress over the years.

“My cousin, Buzz Bissinger, gave me the book in galley form 14 years ago,” Berg relates. “I read it in one sitting and was just completely blown away by this story, these kids, these parents, this community and this really intense football program and the way

he presented it in the book. It just felt very real, very heartbreaking and very powerful, and I always kept my eye on it.

“I played football in high school,” Berg continues. “I thought it was one of the most mature and complex looks at high school sports that I’d ever read. It’s an intense, coming-of-age drama about that culture. I thought it was one of the few stories that talked about high school sports in a way that really captured all of the different elements—the good, the bad, the family elements, the elements of friendship—and, in a pretty sophisticated way, the essence of what it’s like to be 16, 17, 18-years-old and playing in front of your entire community.”

According to Grazer, Berg had been campaigning to direct the film version for several years and had become a frontrunner for helming the picture following his adept handling of the action hit *The Rundown*.

“I didn’t believe early on that Pete and Bissinger were related,” Grazer admits. “Once confirmed, I thought it was karmically cool that there’s the bloodline, that connection. I think it also kept Pete authentic to the literature of the book.”

Once he signed on with Universal and Imagine, Berg started flying (occasionally with Grazer) to Texas every weekend, shooting football footage with a four-camera NFL Films crew.

“I spent the whole 2003 football season going to games in Odessa and Austin,” Berg relates. “My friends thought I was crazy. Every weekend I was leaving L.A. to come to high school football games in Texas. Not to bash professional sports, but pro games don’t come close to the intensity and the energy I’ve seen watching these football games.”

After witnessing the culture firsthand, Berg then campaigned the studio to bring part of the production to the Permian basin, with the intention of filming all the football at Ratliff Stadium, erected in 1982 at a cost of \$6 million and, at the time, the largest high school football stadium in the entire country. On any given Friday, nearly a quarter of Odessa’s population (which currently numbers just over 90,000) fills the stands to capacity to watch their hometown hopefuls on their march towards another expected state playoff berth, an event Bissinger described in his book as “the most exciting sporting event in the entire world.”

“I always said to Pete, ‘You gotta think of this as kids going off to a war,’” Bissinger adds. “That’s how I thought of it when I was writing the book—young, noble kids going off to an early death, metaphorically, the kind of experience that will forever shape you. I think Pete captured that beautifully.”

Berg intercedes, “My take on it, my vision of it, having spent the last season going to about 30 different games and witnessing a lot of really bad injuries, is that I saw a real intensity that I’ve never seen in a film. And my take on this film is football is combat and these guys are warriors.”

“It was almost like the Army or the Marines,” adds Odessa attorney Brian Chavez, the captain of the 1988 Panther team, reflecting back on his formative years at Permian. “The coaches were like drill sergeants. We didn’t have that paternal, father-son type relationship or anything like that. People aspired to play Permian football, to play on Friday night and to try and win the state championship.

“This was the pinnacle. To play Permian football,” echoes Chavez. “Unlike other places, where kids aspire to play for a college team or a pro team, here you aspired to play for Permian. We got treated like a college or pro player. We got special treatment, in school, out of school, walking through the mall, everywhere.”

Adds Permian trainer Tim O’Connell (who took on a similar role both in front of the cameras and behind-the-scenes in Berg’s film), “These kids were gods in that school.”

“For the young men on that Permian team, every moment, every play, was a chance to transcend their small town, a chance to be a hero, a chance to go beyond the limits normally placed on them,” Grazer adds. “It was a chance for glory and that sometimes comes at a cost. For the community, it wasn’t about a game, it was about a lifestyle that shaped and consumed their lives. *Friday Night Lights* hopefully illuminates that, as well as the hopes and dreams of Odessa’s townsfolk.”

“Just saying the words ‘*Friday Night Lights*’ sends goose bumps up and down my spine,” Chavez states, reflecting on the filming of the book. “Seeing those lights and the fans and this football atmosphere brings back those memories of holding hands with my teammates, turning the corner and seeing just a sheet of black...and 20,000 fans screaming and yelling for you. It’s a feeling that’s indescribable!”

THE TEAM...

“The film, like the book, tells the story of the 1988 Permian Panther football team,” director Berg relates. “It focuses on six different players and their coach, Gary Gaines. We begin with the first day of full dress practice in August and end at the state championship game in December at the Houston Astrodome.”

During his many weekend trips to Odessa and Austin to observe and absorb the mood of this unique sports culture, Berg, like author Bissinger 15 years before, insinuated himself into the lives of the town and its citizens, “becoming a sideline regular, going into the locker room after games, wearing the school colors and riding the team bus with all these guys...a pretty surreal experience,” the filmmaker recalls.

These weekend trips also allowed Berg the opportunity and privilege to meet some of the real players in Bissinger’s story, guys like Brian Chavez, Don Billingsley, James ‘Boobie’ Miles and Chris Comer, four of the story’s main characters (Chavez and Miles still live in the Odessa area). These meetings also gave Berg the chance to contemplate whom to cast in the film’s key roles, notably Permian’s noble coach, Gary Gaines, and the six leading players highlighted in the screenplay.

As Permian’s embattled coach, Gary Gaines, Berg and Grazer tapped Oscar®-winner Billy Bob Thornton to embody what he calls “a complicated individual from a psychological perspective. Billy Bob was perfect because he’s never really played a guy like this and seemed to have that kind of complexity. Gaines, as pictured in the book, reminded me of Billy Bob.”

“I’d always been interested in having Billy Bob play Gaines in this movie for several reasons,” echoes producer Grazer about Thornton. “First, he’s very authentic. Even though he’s from Arkansas, he has that style, that Texas way of storytelling. He’s extremely interesting to watch just in terms of detail. And he can express the vulnerability that Coach Gaines has, because there’s an enormous amount of pressure on this coach to succeed—by the boosters, by the town itself. There’s so much emphasis put on these games and that pressure goes directly to Gaines. We have to see his vulnerability.”

“I try to do a different kind of character in every movie,” actor Thornton explains. “I don’t like to play the same person twice. This was a very well written script about an interesting subject. And I had never played a high school football coach before. My father was a high school basketball coach, so I wanted to have that experience. I usually pick movies by the script—if it’s a good character, a good story and something different than I’ve done before. That’s the criteria. This one fit the bill all the way around.

“The way I played Coach Gaines in this movie was as a man who believes in the truth,” Thornton continues. “He is a competitive man that has honor and integrity. He wants to see if he can bring a championship to these people, this town, that so desperately want it. And he owes them, he’s responsible for this team. At the same time, it’s hard to bite the bullet when people accuse him of being less than the man to do the job.”

In bringing Gaines to life on the big screen, Thornton (who once yearned for a professional baseball career) looked to his late father, a high school basketball coach in Arkansas, as a role model, and says, “I absolutely drew from my father’s experiences. I grew up watching my dad as a high school basketball coach. I focused on him in the really intense scenes.”

Since Gaines was noted for, among other things, avoiding profanity, Thornton quips, “I came up with some unique ways to curse out the players.” (The real Mike Winchell remembers one particular incident when, while viewing film footage of a bungled play, Gaines had referred to him as “the village idiot”: “I could taste the blood in my mouth from biting my tongue trying hard not to laugh, thinking, ‘What is a *village idiot*?’”)

Regarding the six Permian players portrayed in his book, Bissinger says, “The most gratifying thing about the book for any writer beyond the success is what those kids felt. I fell in love with those high school kids. They really were special. I developed a deep bond with them that I still have today. Brian Chavez ended up going to Harvard and his family was kind enough to invite me to his graduation. I was there for that.

“I recently spoke to Mike Winchell, the quarterback in the book and in the film,” the author continues. “I speak to Boobie Miles probably once a month. You write a book, usually you move on. The relationships break—but with these kids, there was really something special.”

In 1988, James ‘Boobie’ Miles was looked upon as Permian’s great player, the “great black hope,” as Odessans called him. He was the Panthers’ outstanding running back, who, the author (in two entire chapters devoted to Miles’ exploits that season) writes was a “blue chip recruiting prospect and one of the 10 best running backs in the state who could never imagine life without football.”

When looking back at the 1988 season and remarking that it was a year of unexpected surprises, Bissinger refers to the early season injury sustained by Miles, the unforgettable character of the book who “had an unquenchable feeling that no one on the field, *no one*, was as good as he was. His status in town was almost mythical.”

“Football was my way out,” Miles, now a part-time construction worker, admitted to a journalist visiting the set one March evening. “When you’re the star, a lot of things don’t go exactly the way you plan it to go. I had to grow up and learn that.”

When Berg sought out the book’s characters on one of his many weekend trips to the Permian basin last Fall, he found Miles at one of his regular hangouts. If the limelight escaped him back in 1988, he got a second chance to stand in its selective glow when Berg tapped him to play one of Permian’s sideline coaches, a role without any dialogue...but one with plenty of attention.

Miles’ dramatic life comes to life on the screen through the gifted talents of acclaimed young actor Derek Luke, who made a memorable mark in the title role of Denzel Washington’s directorial debut, *Antwone Fisher*, and captured an Independent Spirit Award for his breakout performance.

Luke got the privilege of meeting his real-life counterpart and comments that bringing the real Boobie to the screen is “a little nerve-wracking. You’re there on the field and you want to do the man justice. You know what I mean? I had a responsibility to Boobie.

“Denzel told me the thing about acting is to keep it dirty,” Luke explains about his approach to playing the real-life running back. “Now, dirty is not a bad word. Dirty means to make it yours. Boobie’s being right there helped to lift the words right off the page. And that kept it dirty, meaning it kept it real for me.

“Boobie’s plan was just to make it in the pros,” Luke describes, “then go back to Odessa and buy a house for his uncle. That meant a lot to him because L.V., his uncle,

did everything for him. He transformed his life, brought him from an abusive childhood of neglect to being in a loving family. It gave him incentive, ambition. And he became a modern day hero in this town.

“Then, his destiny changed when he got injured,” Luke concludes. “But one of the things I felt, what I learned from that situation, is that you have to take your destiny in your own hands.”

In joining Berg’s team, Miles himself had a unique opportunity to relive that unforgettable, tragic moment all over again when he watched from the Ratliff sidelines, over 15 years later, flashing back to that life-changing event as actor Luke (and stunt double Cedric Foster) re-enacted the play when Miles’ knee gets crushed by the opposing team.

Miles comments from the sidelines: “Not too many people can say they’ve had a book and a movie written about them. Derek did a hell of a job playing my part. You couldn’t ask for a better person. He’s a good guy. He looks good.” Miles then adds with a smile, “But he just wasn’t as good-looking as I was back then.”

“Boobie was the big cat, the top dog. This was supposed to be his year,” Bissinger emphasizes. “Just imagine watching yourself in a film. When he watched the scene where he gets hurt, I know he had tears coming down his face, which meant to me that it was done authentically and realistically. I will never forget watching that moment and I say this all the time: one millisecond changed his whole life forever.”

“I had this scene in the locker room at half-time of the big game where the real Boobie was playing an assistant coach,” Thornton relates. “He was standing next to Derek Luke while I’m giving this very emotional speech to the players. At one point I intended to turn and look at Derek. Instead, I accidentally went a little too far when I turned and I was looking right at the real Boobie. In the scene, I’m not the one who’s supposed to be getting choked up, so I had to hold myself together a little bit. It was pretty poignant. This kid had dreams and they were shattered in an instant.”

A few days later, another scene from Boobie’s memorable story was put before the cameras. When the thousand paid extras in the stands were prompted by the assistant directors to cheer for the character of Miles (in the guise of actor Luke) as he makes his triumphant mid-season return after the injury, they needed no persuasion to cheer for

their real-life hero. The adulation denied him as an 18-year-old was given in full—Boobie was finally back.

“I spoke to him a few days after those scenes,” Bissinger states. “There was a timbre in his voice, a freshness. This was kind of a rebirth for him. I think the movie has been a way for him to get the attention and the adulation and the strokes that he never got in his senior year. I was delighted to see that there are second acts in American lives. Sixteen years later, Boobie got his second act. The fact that this kid, who suffered so tragically, has gotten his due makes everything that happens worth it to me.”

For actor Lucas Black, drafted by Berg to join the team as gifted yet insecure quarterback Mike Winchell (about whom Bissinger states, “needed vindication, further proof that he had what it took to be a college quarterback in the Southwest Conference...”), joining the cast of *Lights* was a homecoming on several levels.

Of the five seasoned actors that suited up as the leading Panther players, the Alabama native was the only one with any high school football experience. “The story was basically the same thing I lived through in my high school. I’m from Alabama and football is way up there, just like it is in Texas, and I played high school football—so I know what this story is all about. I think everybody that plays football goes through a similar experience like the Permian Panthers did,” the young actor says.

In describing his character of Permian’s star quarterback, Black relates that “his father passed away when he was young—13, I think. So, he has to take care of his mother, who’s always sick. As he cares for her, she’s really pressing him hard to get a scholarship and go to college. That puts a lot of pressure on him during the football season and Mike’s not really up for all the pressure and hype. But, he gives it his all. He really looks up to Coach Gaines. To Winchell, he’s his role model, kind of a father figure to him, because he didn’t grow up around his father.”

Playing opposite Billy Bob Thornton once again mimicked a familial relationship the duo has shared since their first pairing in 1996 on Thornton’s Oscar®-winning *Sling Blade*.

Black remarks, “This is my third film with Billy Bob. The first film was *Sling Blade*, where I played the boy, Frank. The second film he directed me in was *All the Pretty Horses*...and now this film. I really loved working with him as a director and I

really looked forward to this project when I found out that he was playing the coach. It made the entire experience even better.”

“It’s almost fitting that I’m playing his coach now. And really strange. He’s kind of grown up with me in the movie business,” comments Thornton. “There’s a scene in the film I go to his house and I essentially tell him at some point he’s got to leave the nest and go out on his own and become strong—not only on the football field, but in his life. And it’s a pretty heavy scene, and Lucas and I have done those kinds of scenes together before in other movies. It was a homecoming of sorts for us.”

Winchell, now a resident of the Dallas-Ft. Worth area who plays golf on the Iron Man Tour circuit, describes the magic the Panthers could conjure: “I remember looking across at the teams we were playing at the time—particularly when we got to the playoffs—thinking, ‘There’s no way Permian should be beating these guys, none.’ We weren’t that big, but we were really good athletes, a bunch of tenacious kids. We were playing a real cocky team once. After the kickoff to them, their first play, the carrier went around, didn’t get within four yards of the line of scrimmage—he didn’t fumble, he threw the ball just to get rid of it because he was getting mauled. We were really committed to the game...that’s what I liked about us.”

Despite the intense scrutiny the town focused on its star team, Winchell says that he tried to avoid it and focus on the game: “I mean, you didn’t just play because you wanted to be in the spotlight. You grew up in that town loving football. For me, I didn’t really think about all the other stuff—getting your picture in the paper or on television, which we did quite a lot. After the first time, though, it kind of loses its luster. The first whistle blew and then we’d just go at it until the final whistle blew—and you’d look up and it felt like the whole town was there watching in the 100 degree heat. There were always people around at practices, who followed everything the team did. But you’re around the same people everyday, especially during season, and you really don’t have time to be doing anything else except concentrating on the game.”

Among the players Bissinger chose to follow in the book was Don Billingsley, the tortured tailback who has to try and live up to the expectations of his father, Charlie, who himself had worn the black and white of Permian and “who looked down on the field and saw his reflection in a son who didn’t measure up on the gridiron,” per Bissinger.

Billingsley went on to earn a Masters degree, marry and move to Dallas, where he works in the health field.

“Billingsley, in the book and in the script, is the outcast character, just kind of a bad ass,” states 19-year-old Garrett Hedlund, whose role in the film was only his second big screen performance, following his debut opposite Brad Pitt in *Troy*.

“His home life with his father, Charlie, was always fraught with friction because his father had played for the Permian Panthers,” Hedlund continues. “He took them to state. His name was carved in gold throughout the town. Everybody knew who he was. And he just wanted his son to share that same stature throughout the town, something that kept Charlie going throughout his whole life after football. I think Charlie felt that Don was a little weak because he couldn’t overcome the pressure that the town put on him. I think that’s what disappointed Charlie.”

Don Billingsley had lived in Odessa until he was nine, at which time he moved with his mother and step-father to Oklahoma; he returned to Odessa to live with his father when he was 15. Many of Permians’ athletes were second, third or fourth generation, as was the case with Billingsley, who explains, “My entire family had gone to Permian and graduated from there—and that was something I wanted to do. My dad had grown up in Odessa and had played for Permian twenty years before I did. He was tough; he had played with two broken wrists and continued on.

“I think, like any son, you want to please your parents and if you’re in athletics, primarily your dad,” Billingsley reasons. “But I don’t think that was the pressure of Permian. The pressure for me as a player and I believe for all the other players on the team was the legacy that was set before us. And we knew that that was what we aim to achieve. Not only the team and the coaches, but the community was looking forward to a state championship.”

But in the end, it comes around to family. He states, “I think everybody we played with was like family because I spent more time on the field or in the locker room or in class with all of our team mates than I did at home with family...I mean we *were* family.”

For the demanding role of troubled Billingsley patriarch, Charlie, Berg also tapped another relatively untested talent in front of the motion picture cameras, Grammy-winning recording artist Tim McGraw.

“Tim was Pete Berg’s idea and I was very excited about it,” Grazer enthuses. “I had met Tim before, on *The Grinch*, because his wife, Faith Hill, sang one of the songs. His character, Charlie, was an athlete and a tough guy, in some ways, an unsympathetic character. He’s got a 17-year-old son that’s quite vulnerable, and in some ways you’re not sure whether Don’s playing for himself or whether he’s doing it for his father.”

McGraw, himself a star athlete in his Louisiana high school days, confesses, “It was an amazing opportunity and, of course, I couldn’t help but be drawn to a story about high school football. When I started reading the script, reading Charlie’s part, there was just something I thought I could sink my teeth into. I mean, growing up in Louisiana and playing Little League and school sports, you ran across a lot of parents like that.

“Charlie was a hero when he played ball in high school,” McGraw continues about his character, a guy who moved ahead with his life and now coaches high school football in Houston. “He was an all-state athlete and went on to play a little bit of college ball. He was a star and had high expectations for his life. At the time, that never really developed into what he wanted his life to become. So, he’s kind of a lost guy, a guy struggling with his own problems. Now he’s got this teenage son playing football for Permian and he doesn’t live up to how good Charlie thinks his son ought to be. That’s the turmoil going on inside this broken man. This scenario of watching his son play football feeds into everything going wrong with his life.”

Another of Coach Gaines’ 1988 star players was a tight end named Brian Chavez, who, per Bissinger, “set his sights on a target that seemed incomprehensible to his family, his friends, just about everyone—going to Harvard.” Chavez is played by one of Hollywood’s hottest young talents, Jay Hernandez.

“I loved football, that’s why I played,” says the real Chavez. “I think a lot of guys played for the popularity or to be somebody. But I played to play football. I loved hitting. I loved the game. I was the captain, so I was one of the leaders.”

In reality, Chavez’s aspirations stretched beyond the regal playing field in that West Texas town all the way to the manicured campus of Harvard, where he earned his

undergraduate degree in 1993. He studied law on a full scholarship at Texas Tech University before returning to his hometown as a successful criminal attorney.

He says, “I always knew there was something else out there for me. The way my parents raised me, I knew that I was going to do something with my life. There was something more out there after those Friday night lights went out...after football. I don’t think it really changed me a whole lot. I got my 15 minutes of fame. The book was like having your senior yearbook immortalized.”

With the film, Chavez’s life as a high school football player is embodied by actor Hernandez, who had the privilege of meeting his real-life counterpart as filming unfolded on the turf at Ratliff. “There is a little bit of pressure,” Hernandez comments about the responsibility of portraying a real person. “The cool thing about Brian is he’s very easygoing. Regarding this film, he’s happy that it’s being made and he told me he was happy with how I was portraying him.”

One of the themes Bissinger explored in his book—that of the complex bond between father and son—becomes a pivotal focus of the screenplay, something producer Grazer calls “the heartbeat dynamic in terms of relationships in the movie.”

As the son tries to step into his father’s inestimable shoes, so must a young, somewhat unfocused running back step out from the shadow of Boobie Miles. When Miles was scrapped from Gaines’ lineup back in 1988, “we scrambled hard, went through two or three running backs, before Chris Comer finally ended up being the guy to replace Boobie,” Chavez recalls.

Comer was the Panthers’ third-string running back, a kid Bissinger described in his book as “the untested junior who became the new great black hope who replaces Boobie in the backfield.” Comer (now a security guard in Houston) was not one of the six major players Bissinger spotlighted in the book (“I chose only seniors, and Comer was a junior that year”); however, he made the cut in Berg’s script. Actor Lee Thompson Young (well-known for his title role on the Disney Channel’s popular series, *The Famous Jett Jackson*) made Berg’s celluloid team and Comer is his first major motion picture role.

Bissinger's book features photographer Rob Clark, Jr.'s iconic shot of the three team captains, holding hands, walking out onto mid-field for a coin toss: Mike Winchell, Brian Chavez and Ivory Christian.

Christian, a long-haul truck driver who is still based in Odessa, also had a fitting name. In addition to his talents on the field, he was also Permian's spiritual leader, the guy who led his teammates in prayer after half-time locker room pep talks by Coach Gaines.

Film newcomer Lee Jackson, who never got the chance to meet the real Christian, wasn't necessarily praying for a career in the movie business. A former star linebacker and safety with the University of Texas Longhorns (he graduated in 2002), he was released after pre-season tryouts by the NFL's Tennessee Titans football franchise before attending football coordinator Allan Graf's casting call for the movie in December, 2003.

The 6'3", 225-lb. Jackson (who also had a brief stint with the Austin Wranglers of the Arena Football League) was one of 960 guys who applied for one of 40 spots on the film's football squad. Director Berg, reviewing the applications of the 260 applicants who made the cut for Graf's Austin-based tryout camp, auditioned Jackson on three different occasions before choosing the college gridiron star to act in his very first movie.

THE TOWNS...

"Any time the surroundings represent the real story, it's going to help you as an actor," Thornton states about filming on the actual location where Bissinger's story is set. "It puts you in a different frame of mind. In the case of *Friday Night Lights*, we shot part of the movie where the story actually took place, out in Odessa, Texas. When you're around the people who were actually there when this happened, it gives you a certain sense of nostalgia and an emotion that maybe you wouldn't have if you were shooting someplace else."

Adds director Berg, "It was really important for us to come shoot in Odessa. It made production a bit more challenging, but it's so unique. It's so wide open and, I think, really quite beautiful. It was very important for us to get that look of the town on camera. I knew we had to film at Ratliff once I came down and watched my first Permian game. There was magic in the air."

Before Berg led his production team to the flatlands and oil fields of West Texas, Austin, Texas’ capital city, figured prominently in the first half of the film’s shooting schedule. *Friday Night Lights* shot in a variety of locales around Austin (including interiors at William B. Travis High School, doubling for the halls of Permian High, and Burger Stadium, briefly standing in for Ratliff) during the first five weeks of production before heading out to the windswept landscape of the Permian basin.

While much of the production filmed on actual, practical locations in each of the three Texas cities (Austin, Odessa, Houston) chosen for the project, seasoned production designer Sharon Seymour did construct one key set for the movie—the Permian locker room, which Seymour designed and built inside the basement of the Palmer Auditorium, Austin’s shuttered downtown concert arena.

Seymour also collaborated with veteran set decorator Carla Curry to dress another locker room in Midland (Odessa’s twin city, 20 miles east on Rt. 20) to double for locker rooms in the Houston Astrodome, where Berg staged the film’s climactic state championship game (the ‘Dome’s locker rooms were deemed unsuitable for filming).

Allan Graf, one of Hollywood’s premiere second-unit directors and stunt coordinators, set up shop in yet another locker room in Austin (St. Stephen’s Academy) to begin his football training program for Berg’s sports drama. In addition to designing the football plays for the film, the former U.S.C. offensive lineman was also responsible for drafting the 40-man squad to fill out the ranks of Permian’s team (beyond Berg’s principal cast), as well as those of the rival schools in the script.

Graf is one of U.S.C.’s gridiron greats from their phenomenal 1972 NCAA national title team, which enjoyed an undefeated season culminating in their climactic win over Ohio State in the Rose Bowl. He is also one of Hollywood’s best known pigskin “choreographers,” designing and staging the football action for such films as Oliver Stone’s *Any Given Sunday*, Howard Deutch’s *The Replacements*, *The Program*, *The Waterboy*, *Necessary Roughness*, the recent *Cheer Up* and Cameron Crowe’s Oscar®-nominated *Jerry Maguire*.

“While it may look choreographed, this is real football. You can’t fake football,” explains Graf, the seasoned veteran who designed and executed over 100 plays (photographed by multiple camera crews under the guidance of NFL Films’ veteran

Thom Owens) that spotlight not only the principal cast, but that formidable team of 40 extras Graf hand-picked from over 900 applicants, 260 of whom participated in a three-day tryout camp he supervised in Austin in late January.

While Graf is highly respected in the business for his football acumen and ability to “make football look better on-screen than I’d seen it in past movies,” he also had a huge fan in director Berg, whom he directed in all the second-unit football action in the 1994 HBO movie *Rise and Walk: The Dennis Byrd Story*, the inspirational saga of the former New York Jets player who sustained a crippling neck injury on the playing field and overcame his paralysis to walk again.

“The process of putting the team together is pretty amazing,” explains Graf, affectionately called “the Coach” by his team. “I have to start from scratch. And by scratch I mean I had to go to Austin, Texas, and start looking for football players. I put out a casting call through the media. I went on television. I did radio and newspaper interviews. We were looking for football players between the ages of 18 and 26 with a minimum of two years college experience, preferably guys from U.T. who had already graduated.”

Over a three-day period in early December, 2003—a full two months before his training camp would begin at St. Stephens Academy—Graf personally interviewed over 900 potential applicants (he hoped for a turnout of 600), reviewing their high school, college and, in some cases, semi-pro stats.

Like a Marine drill sergeant, Graf barked out his patented welcome speech, explaining how his system would work during his three-day tryout camp scheduled for the last week in January, 2004. If any of the candidates for the 40-man squad made the first cut, they then reported to Graf’s camp for an actual NFL “combine,” a grueling three-day test for agility, speed and stamina, on which he worked with his assistant coach, Justin Reimer (whom he met on *The Replacements*).

“So they show up, 960 guys, not all football players mind you, but 960 guys, and I invited about 260 to try out for the combine,” Graf relates. “And the combine is like trying out for pro football. This is no Hollywood audition. We put them through the agility drills, bag drills, the 40-yard dash and all that. We put them through exactly what

they would do if they were trying out for the pros. And that way, we find out if they were athletic or not.”

Once Graf recruited his 40-man squad (which included eight former U.T. players), “we then draw up the plays for the whole script and started teaching and training them. It took four weeks for them to learn the playbooks, going through the script and learning each play. In this movie, we had somewhere between 96 and 116 plays. That’s a lot of football for a movie, especially to be shot in seven weeks. My work was cut out for me.”

During the six-week training session, Graf lost some of the players to injuries, or wound up cutting others from the squad even though they initially showed talent in the tryout camp. One Texan (among a disparate group of gridiron hopefuls) who made it through the entire shoot was a Houston teacher named Ryan Jacobs, a Hollywood-handsome, 26-year-old former college player who quit his teaching job because, “I’d never done anything like this. I hope one day to coach high school football, so this experience is invaluable.”

Another key player who enrolled on Graf’s squad was his 23-year-old son, Derek, who, like his dad, played for the U.S.C. Trojans (at center, he finished his college career in the 2003 Orange Bowl); like father, like son, Derek is also eyeing a career in front of the cameras as a stuntman.

In addition to training the Graf squad, the Coach also devoted plenty of time to conditioning four of the six actors who portrayed the story’s key players. Aside from actor Black (“I had to throw a little bit when I heard I was playing quarterback to make sure I kept up the spirals”) and former U.T. safety Jackson (“The coaches told everybody, ‘Don’t hit the actors...unless it’s Lee Jackson, you could hit him ‘cause he’s a football player’”), the other four had no formal (or informal) football experience prior to joining Berg’s team.

“It was pretty intense. I’d never played any football, so I had a lot to learn,” actor Lee Thompson Young confesses about experiencing Coach Graf’s drills. “In Austin, we were doing two practices a day, two three-hour practices a day. That’s six hours of football. It was hard. My ankles started hurting, my knees started hurting. I gained a

new respect for athletes and a new understanding of how physically you can be worn down. We trained like that for about a month.”

Graf continued his training program in Austin while Berg filmed most of the production’s character-driven dramatic scenes during the first five weeks of the schedule. Then, the two units combined and it was off to Odessa for three weeks of hard-hitting football scenes at Ratliff Stadium, which encompassed most of the March calendar.

Odessa is the largest town and county seat of Ector County. The Ector County school system’s three high schools—Odessa, Permian and the Career Center—are located in Odessa. The county’s football prowess is evident in the following statistics: Odessa High won the Texas state high school championship in 1946, and Permian High captured it six times between 1965 and 1991.

One Odessa native (by way of Iowa) who lived through the 1988 season was Tim ‘Trapper’ O’Connell, Permian’s football trainer and a fixture on the local football scene since 1982 at Odessa, Permian and, briefly, Midland High.

“I was a student trainer at the University of Iowa when I arrived at Odessa High in 1982,” O’Connell relates. “I went over to Permian in ‘85 when John Wilkins was the head coach. He moved up to athletic director when Gary Gaines became head coach in 1986. And I was with Gary for four seasons.”

After leaving the football arena for eight years between 1991-99 (working for a local orthopedic doctor), O’Connell returned to Permian in 2001 after a few seasons at Midland, one of Permian’s feared rivals on the gridiron. While not cast to play himself in the film, his recollections proved invaluable to director Berg and Graf in his role on the film as Graf’s head trainer, who was charged with tending to the bruises and pulled muscles suffered by some on Graf’s squad.

“Thousands of kids play high school football. It’s a life experience for them, something that really changes their lives. They meet some people, be it coaches or other kids or families, that make differences in their lives. I would hope that’s what this movie teaches. I believe the film will have a positive spin for the community. It was exciting to have a movie made in your own backyard,” says O’Connell.

In Odessa, O’Connell was back home in his element—Ratliff Stadium, where Berg and Graf directed their separate units, first over several days filming the pre-season

practices and drills that Coach Gaines put his team through, then following with a solid two weeks of grueling nighttime football.

Before hitting the gridiron, the cast changed into their football jerseys in their own personal trailers while Graf's squad suited up in the home locker room at Ratliff, where nightly, veteran sports costumer Roric Ruegsegger (a longtime Graf ally) provided all the football uniforms (about 500, plus equipment) to the cast and the Coach's 40-man specialists; extras playing opposing teams used the visitors locker room. While Ruegsegger concentrated only on the team uniforms, costume designer Susan Matheson handled all the non-sports wardrobe requirements, which included the recreation of Permian's handsome letter jackets from 1988.

On *Friday Night Lights*, cameraman Thom Owens, an NFL Films veteran since 1988, supervised all of Graf's second-unit camerawork for the 100+ plays he staged for the film. While maintaining the look established by the film's director of photography, Tobias Schliessler (who re-teamed with Berg on the film after *The Rundown*), Owens cites his mandate as "capturing the action in the moment, which means not only covering the plays, but telling the story.

"The coaches draw up the plays, then the players spend weeks learning and perfecting them before they provide them to me," Owens says about how he uses his computer to formulate his own game plan. "I then put them into a program in which I superimpose on the plays my camera positions, with notes to cameramen, that translate into the logistical aspects of executing the job—what lenses, what frame rates, what coverage styles, what camera support systems, personnel, camera movement, et cetera—that need be ready for shooting."

Owens illustrates his contributions by citing one of the film's key football *and* dramatic moments in the story...when star running back Boobie Miles suffers his life-altering injury.

"Boobie is the hero up until this moment when he takes a pitch out, heads to his right, then changes direction and takes a brutal hit from two or three defenders at once," Owens details. "And a knee is injured. So we as cameramen obviously needed to cover the play in its basic sense. But we also needed to tell that story of great expectations dashed and a whole team shocked at the possible loss of their number one guy. So it's

more than just covering the ball, making the highlight. It's telling the story of a tragic moment for the Permian Panthers and whether they can overcome this loss."

When Permian completed the 1988 season on the first Friday night in November, they had an identical district record (5-1) with two of their area rivals—the Midland High Bulldogs and the Midland-Lee Rebels (who had beaten the Panthers earlier that season). The league's rules did not mandate playoff games to determine which two teams were headed into the State playoffs...the flip of three coins did. And it really happened at a truck stop diner called The Convoy on the outskirts of Odessa.

After scouting more than 40 Odessa and Austin sites in which to stage the nail-biting sequence, Berg, with the help of veteran Texas location manager Robbie Friedmann, settled on a barbecue joint 20 miles south of the Texas capital called The Southside Market.

"It was a very odd scene, almost surreal," Thornton recalls after recreating the most melodramatic moment of that season. "To have football coaches meet at a truck stop to toss a coin to determine who gets into the playoffs. That obsession with football in Texas all culminated right there in that diner."

"There was a ton on the line for Gaines," the author adds. "If he had not gotten into the playoffs with the type of team that he had, it would have been the second year out of three, and I think they would have fired him. Someone once said, 'There was no job with less security than a Texas high school football coach.' And I think that's true."

With the coin tipping his way, Gaines' true test still lay ahead—the 1988 State Championship game against the Dallas Carter Cowboys, an all-black high school and always one of Texas' most fearsome rivals. For dramatic purposes, Berg changed the actual semi-final game against Dallas Carter to the championship finals and moved the location in the script from Texas Stadium (home of the University of Texas Longhorns) to the Houston Astrodome, former home of the Houston Astros and the NFL's defunct franchise, the Oilers.

While the 62,000-seat 'Dome (which opened in 1965 as the Harris Domed Stadium) houses much history not only for the state of Texas, but also for American sports, it also harbored some poignant memories for the film's stars.

“There was a lot of history in both places, Ratliff and the Astrodome,” McGraw observes. “When you went down on the Ratliff field and started going through your lines and doing your part, it lent a lot of authenticity to your emotions. The Astrodome held a certain set of emotions for me as well. As a kid, that’s the first place I saw my father play baseball. Houston was the first town where I ever met my father, when I was 11-years-old. And the first ‘pro’ anything I’d ever seen was two hours after I met my father for the first time, walking into the Astrodome, watching him play baseball. So that had a whole set of emotions for me that helped my character and helped me try to find the energy that I needed to play the character.”

In addition to the reverence felt by many as they entered the ‘Dome every day for almost two weeks, there were also the emotions established by director Berg in the staging of the climactic championship game.

“At the very end of the game,” co-star Lucas Black relates, “Mike Winchell stands there, realizing he gave it his all, played his hardest. He kind of grows up a lot right there in that moment. The coach taught him a lot about football and a lot about life, and it took Winchell the entire season to realize those things.”

“The real game was played in Texas Stadium at the University of Texas in Austin,” Bissinger confirms as he celebrated the film’s early April wrap alongside his blood relative at the ‘Dome—Berg had cast Bissinger as an extra in a brief sequence as the Odessa boosters cheer on their team from a private skybox. “I had never been in the Astrodome. But it’s an appropriate setting because there were Texas high school championship games played in the Astrodome.”

Author Bissinger first visited his cousin’s set back in Austin, where “it brought back goosebumps seeing those letter jackets.” (He chose not to return to Odessa to observe the football action: “I felt my presence would distract from the film.” The author later visited Odessa again and shared his observations, 16 years after the beginning of that infamous 1988 season, in *Sports Illustrated*.)

Friday Night Lights commenced production on February 2, 2004, in Austin, Texas, and concluded filming on April 8, 2004, at Texas’ famous Houston Astrodome. The 45-day schedule shot entirely on location in Texas, including three weeks at Odessa’s Ratliff Stadium.

When filming concluded in the early evening hours of April 8, Berg explained what he tried to achieve on-screen after first reading his cousin’s book some 14 years before: “The biggest pressure I felt was to all the families and coaches I got to know really well. I tried to make a movie that presents their world in a real and fair manner. There were a lot of masters that I had to please—first and foremost, my cousin, whom I respect very much. He’s going to be the first pair of eyes I have to face when those lights come up after the first screening. I’ve thought about that all the time. I just wanted to make a movie that Buzzy could be proud of.”

Universal Pictures and Imagine Entertainment Present A Brian Grazer Production of A Peter Berg Film: Billy Bob Thornton in *Friday Night Lights*, starring Derek Luke, Jay Hernandez, Lucas Black, Garrett Hedlund and Tim McGraw. The music producer is Brian Reitzell; the original music is by Explosions in the Sky. The costumer designer is Susan Matheson. It is edited by David Rosenbloom, A.C.E. The production designer is Sharon Seymour; the director of photography is Tobias Schliessler. The executive producers are James Whitaker and John Cameron. The film is based on the book by H.G. Bissinger, with a screenplay by David Aaron Cohen and Peter Berg. *Friday Night Lights* is produced by Brian Grazer and directed by Peter Berg. ©2004 Universal Studios. www.fridaynightlightsmovie.com

THE ACTORS...

Academy Award®-winning writer, actor, director and musician, **BILLY BOB THORNTON (Coach Gary Gaines)** has an extensive and impressive career in motion pictures, television and theater. Charismatic and uniquely talented, Thornton has established himself as one of the most sought after filmmakers of his generation.

Billy Bob Thornton is currently celebrating a high-water mark in his career. Most recently, Thornton starred in and garnered a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actor in a Musical or Comedy for his role in the critically acclaimed hit *Bad Santa*, and received rave reviews for his portrayal of legendary frontiersman Davy Crockett in Touchstone Pictures' *The Alamo*. He is currently in production on Harold Ramis' dark comedy *Ice Harvest*, co-starring John Cusack.

Showing the versatility of his acting abilities, in 2001 Thornton starred in the caper comedy *Bandits* for director Barry Levinson and co-starring Bruce Willis and Cate Blanchett; the noir *The Man Who Wasn't There* for the Coen brothers; and the heart-wrenching drama *Monster's Ball*, in which he co-starred with Halle Berry, Peter Boyle and Heath Ledger.

Each of the three performances garnered Thornton unprecedented critical acclaim and resulted in him being named Best Actor of 2001 by the National Board of Review and receiving Golden Globe nominations for Best Actor in a Drama for *The Man Who Wasn't There* and Best Actor in a Musical or Comedy for *Bandits*, as well as an American Film Institute Award nomination for Best Actor for *The Man Who Wasn't There*.

Thornton's 1996 release of the critically acclaimed and phenomenally popular feature film *Sling Blade* (in which he starred and directed from an original script he wrote) firmly secured his status as a pre-eminent filmmaker. For his efforts, he was honored with both an Academy Award® for Best Adapted Screenplay and an Academy Award® nomination for Best Actor. The film, produced by The Shooting Gallery and released by Miramax, also starred Robert Duvall, J.T. Walsh, Dwight Yoakum and John Ritter.

Prior to *Sling Blade*, Thornton already had an extensive motion picture credit list. He wrote and starred in the thrilling character drama *One False Move*, which brought him

immediate critical praise. Thornton's powerful script (co-written with Tom Epperson) was enhanced by his intense performance as a hunted criminal. The film, directed by Carl Franklin, was an unheralded sleeper success.

In addition, Thornton has been featured in such films as *The Winner* for director Alex Cox; *Indecent Proposal*, directed by Adrian Lyne; *Deadman* for Jim Jarmusch; and *Tombstone* for George Cosmatos.

Thornton has also appeared in the films *On Deadly Ground*, *Bound By Honor*, *For The Boys* and *The Stars Fell on Henrietta*.

As a writer, Thornton has worked on numerous projects for United Artists, Miramax, Universal Pictures, Warner Bros., Touchstone Pictures, Island Pictures, David Geffen Productions and HBO. He also scripted *A Family Thing*, a highly regarded feature film that starred Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones.

Thornton has also co-starred in the blockbuster action-adventure film *Armageddon* with Bruce Willis for producer Jerry Bruckheimer; co-starred opposite Sean Penn and Nick Nolte in *U-Turn*, directed by Oliver Stone; and starred in *Primary Colors* opposite John Travolta and Emma Thompson for director Mike Nichols. He also starred in the dark comedy *Pushing Tin* opposite John Cusack.

Thornton received an Academy Award® nomination and Golden Globe nomination for Best Supporting Actor for his celebrated work in the tightly woven drama *A Simple Plan* for director Sam Raimi, as well as a Best Supporting Actor award from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association and a Best Supporting Actor nomination from the Screen Actors Guild.

For his second and third directorial outings, Thornton chose the comedy *Daddy and Them*, which he again wrote and starred in, and the epic screen version of the best-selling Cormac McCarthy novel, *All the Pretty Horses*, starring Matt Damon, Penelope Cruz and Henry Thomas.

Thornton also co-wrote *The Gift*, starring Cate Blanchett, Giovanni Ribisi and Hilary Swank. Thornton's other film credits include the comedy *Waking Up In Reno*, co-starring Charlize Theron, Patrick Swayze and Natascha Richardson; the drama *Levity*, in which he co-starred with Morgan Freeman, Holly Hunter and Kirsten Dunst; *Intolerable*

Cruelty, co-starring George Clooney and Catherine Zeta Jones; and *Love Actually*, with Hugh Grant, Laura Linney and Liam Neeson.

TIM McGRAW (Charlie Billingsley), who has his first studio starring role in the film, is one of country music's contemporary giants and one of the music industry's most popular and respected performers. The Louisiana-bred superstar has enjoyed a decade-long hot streak that encompasses 23 Number One singles, seven multi-platinum albums, sales of over 30 million discs and a list of awards that is encyclopedic in length.

His newest and ninth record, *Live Like You Were Dying* (released August 24, 2004), provided McGraw's incredible career another landmark: the CD's first single and title track, "Live Like You Were Dying," became one of his fastest-to-the-top singles ever. Recording the album's 16 songs with his touring band gives what McGraw summarizes as "a really personal feel" to the tapestry of tunes penned by some of the finest writers around—the CD abounds with the comfort and honesty of the symbiotic relationship honed by years of touring and performing together.

This album follows the extraordinarily successful 15-song collection entitled *Tim McGraw and the Dancehall Doctors*, which he and his longtime touring band had also recorded in a mountaintop studio in upstate New York—the atmosphere and isolation produced a riveting tour de force whose superb songs are matched by gritty, inventive arrangements and loose, effortlessly soulful performances. Upon its release, McGraw appeared in his first network TV special (shot in his hometown of Start, Louisiana), which aired in November, 2002, on NBC to stellar ratings.

Growing up, McGraw maintained an equal devotion to music and athletics, but was irrevocably drawn to the former while attending Northeast Louisiana University. After teaching himself to play guitar and cutting his teeth playing solo in local nightspots, he decided to try his luck in Nashville. Moving to Music City on little more than a wing and a prayer, the young upstart hit the local club circuit and wasted little time in establishing himself as a singularly charismatic performer.

After signing with Curb Records and releasing his self-titled debut album in April 1993, McGraw achieved his commercial breakthrough with his second album, 1994's *Not A Moment Too Soon*, which became the year's top-selling country album and spawned a

pair of trademark hits, the rambunctious rocker “Indian Outlaw” and the sensitive ballad “Don’t Take the Girl.” The latter tune became his first Number One hit, and McGraw progressed from struggling club act to headliner almost overnight, eventually winning Academy of Country Music awards for Album of the Year and Top New Male Vocalist later that same year.

His third album, 1995’s *All I Want*, debuted at Number One on the Billboard country album chart and spawned three Number One singles, including the anthemic “I Like It, I Love It.” The album was followed by the Spontaneous Combustion tour, which became the year’s top-drawing country tour. The tour also featured opening act Faith Hill, whom McGraw married in late 1996. The same year, McGraw went behind the scenes as producer, helping to launch the multi-platinum career of Jo Dee Messina, all three of whose albums he’s co-produced in collaboration with Byron Gallimore.

McGraw’s 1997 release *Everywhere* yielded no less than five Number One singles, including “It’s Your Love,” which became the most-played single since Billboard began monitoring airplay; and “Just to See You Smile,” which became Billboard’s longest-running modern chart single, spending 42 weeks on the chart. *Everywhere*, which the Country Music Association named Album of the Year, also marked McGraw’s first official co-production credit on one of his own albums.

1999’s *A Place in the Sun* debuted at Number One on both the Billboard Pop and Country charts, produced four more Number One singles including “Something Like That” and “My Next Thirty Years,” and won the Country Music Association’s Album of the Year and Male Vocalist awards. McGraw spent much of Summer 1999 on the wildly successful *A Place in the Sun* tour, with opening act the Dixie Chicks, as well as performing for the second year in a row as the featured artist on the George Strait Country Music Festival tour.

The following year took him on the Soul 2 Soul 2000 tour, which teamed him with Faith Hill and played to sellout crowds in 64 cities (including a sold-out show at New York’s Madison Square Garden), becoming one of the year’s five top-grossing concert tours in all musical genres. That same year, Curb released his Greatest Hits CD, which spent nine weeks at the top of the charts.

In 2001, McGraw recorded *Set This Circus Down*, a musically and thematically ambitious effort that confirmed McGraw's commitment to expanding his artistic reach beyond country's accepted commercial boundaries. Fans embraced the soulful delivery and reflective lyrical tone of the smash singles "Grown Men Don't Cry," "Angry All the Time" and "The Cowboy in Me." Meanwhile, the iconoclastic personal statement "Things Change" made history as the first country song to ever chart from a downloaded version, after McGraw debuted the song on the CMA Awards show.

That same year, McGraw took home the CMA's Entertainer of the Year award and five Billboard Music Awards, as well as his first Grammy, for Best Country Vocal Collaboration, "Let's Make Love," the memorable duet with wife Faith Hill. He landed his second Grammy nomination in 2003 for Best Male Country Vocal Performance, and won a 2004 People's Choice Award as Favorite Male Musical Performer.

McGraw is one of only three men to grace the cover of *Redbook*, his NBC Live Concert Special in 2002 ranked higher than specials by U2 and Paul McCartney, and he was the headline act at the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Concert.

DEREK LUKE (Boobie Miles) is currently in New Orleans shooting his second film this year for Jerry Bruckheimer, *Glory Road*. In this film based on a true story, Luke will play the star basketball player on an all-black team in the 1960's who goes on to beat an all-white undefeated Kentucky team in the NCAA finals.

Handsome and gifted with a winning grin, Derek Luke was relatively unknown except for appearances on the television series *Moesha* and *The King of Queens*.

During the casting process for *Antwone Fisher* (2002), Luke's determination and perseverance paid off when he caught the attention of the film's first-time director, Denzel Washington, amongst hundreds of other young hopefuls. A New Jersey native and former employee at the Sony Pictures gift shop (where he sold candy for five years), Derek auditioned for the role of Antwone Fisher five times over a four-year period before he finally won the starring role that marked his big break into feature films, playing the real-life black sailor who must overcome his rage over the traumas of his youth. The young actor was heaped with critical accolades for his emotional, vulnerable performance.

Derek was next seen starring in *Biker Boyz* (2003) opposite Laurence Fishburne and Kid Rock, playing a rookie African-American motorcycle street racer hoping to dethrone the reigning champ.

Luke also recently starred in the critically acclaimed independent film, *Pieces of April*, written and directed by Peter Hedges (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*), opposite Katie Holmes and Patricia Clarkson.

Derek was last seen starring opposite Val Kilmer in the David Mamet feature *Spartan* for Warner Bros. Studios.

In addition to his role in *Friday Night Lights*, **JAY HERNANDEZ (Brian Chavez)** can also be seen starring in Disney's simultaneously released *Ladder 49*, with John Travolta and Joaquin Phoenix. He has also completed filming the lead role for *The Nomad*, directed by Ivan Passer.

Hernandez most recently starred in the Warner Bros. feature *Torque*, directed by Joseph Kahn, as one of the lead bikers in this fast-paced adventure set in the world of motorcycle racing; and in Disney's hit film *The Rookie*, as Joaquin 'Wack' Campos, a student of the real-life baseball pro, Jim Morris, played by Dennis Quaid.

Jay burst onto the scene as the romantic lead starring opposite Kirsten Dunst in *crazy/beautiful*. Born and raised in Montebello, California, Jay was in Hollywood with his parents when he was "discovered" in the classic movie fashion—the Hernandez family shared an elevator with talent manager, Howard Tyner, who discovered Jay and by the time they reached the lobby, a career had begun. His first acting job was in the independent feature *Living the Life*.

LUCAS BLACK (Mike Winchell) reunites once again with Billy Bob Thornton after his role as the boyish misfit, Jimmy Blevins, in Thornton's adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*. He preceded that re-teaming with his unforgettable performance as Frank Wheatley, the boy who compassionately befriends a mentally handicapped murderer, in Thornton's Oscar®-winning *Sling Blade*. For the latter, Black shared a Screen Actors Guild nomination with the film's ensemble cast and won the Young Artists Award, the first of four nominations for this honor.

Without any formal acting training, the Alabama native made an auspicious debut at age 11 opposite star Kevin Costner in John Avnet's 1994 feature, *The War*. The performance helped him land the role of Caleb Temple in the CBS supernatural drama, *American Gothic*. He continued an active acting career in such projects as Rob Reiner's *The Ghosts of Mississippi*, Antonio Banderas' directorial debut, *Crazy in Alabama*, and Rob Bowman's big screen version of *The X Files*. He has also appeared in guest-starring roles on *Chicago Hope* and in Disney's movie-of-the-week, *Flash*.

Black, who graduated from Speake High School in 2001 (where he played football, baseball, basketball and golf), most recently appeared alongside Oscar® nominee Jude Law in Anthony Minghella's Academy Award®-nominated Civil War epic, *Cold Mountain*. He just completed roles in two independent features: *Killer Diller* and *Deepwater*, a noirish thriller also starring Peter Coyote.

Newcomer **GARRETT HEDLUND (Don Billingsley)** made an auspicious motion picture debut as part of the all-star cast in Wolfgang Petersen's recent *Troy*, the big-budget movie based on *The Iliad*, Homer's epic account of the Trojan War and the bloody battle between the Achaeans (Greece) and Trojans.

Hedlund, who portrays Patroclus, Achilles' teenage cousin who aspires to become a warrior, co-starred opposite Brad Pitt (as Achilles), Eric Bana, Peter O'Toole, Julie Christie, Brian Cox, Brendan Gleeson, Orlando Bloom, Saffron Burrows and Diane Kruger as Helen of Troy.

Just 18 when he debuted in Petersen's epic film, Hedlund was born in northern Minnesota and spent his high school years in Scottsdale, Arizona. He began taking private acting classes while in high school and took a unique approach to his pursuit of the craft by reading screenplays of older films, watching those films on video, then pretending he was auditioning for one of the roles in the film. He also spent countless hours reading the Hollywood trade papers at his local bookstore and calling agents in Los Angeles. He graduated from high school a semester early and immediately packed his bags and headed for Hollywood.

LEE THOMPSON YOUNG (Chris Comer) recently completed the F/X Networks' *Redemption: The Stan Tookie Williams Story*, working alongside Jamie Foxx and Lynn Whitfield, under the direction of Vondie Curtis-Hall. In addition, for the past two seasons Young has had a recurring role on the CBS drama *The Guardian*. He has also guest-starred in the Viacom series *Jake 2.0*.

Young is probably best known for his role of Jett Jackson, the alias daring television action-star Silverstone on Disney's *The Famous Jett Jackson*. The series aired for three successful seasons and culminated in a special two-hour movie, *Jett Jackson – The Movie*. During his run on the show, he also wrote an episode, which was produced.

In addition to appearing in numerous commercials, he starred in the Disney Channel original movie *Johnny Tsunami* and had a role in the television series *New York Undercover*. In 1997 he was cast in a production of Anna Deavere Smith's play *House Arrest*, which had a successful run at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C.

Lee was born in Columbia, South Carolina, and began acting at the age of 10. He played Dr. Martin Luther King in a local production of *A Night of Stars and Dreams*. He parlayed this role into a one-man show entitled *Young Treasures*, which included ghost stories, some material from his Dr. King role, as well as a speech written by Lee on the importance of having a goal. He moved to New York, where he attended the High School of the Performing Arts, and received a full scholarship to the University of Southern California film school, where he is a film and television major and continues to hone his craft.

LEE JACKSON (Ivory Christian) makes his professional acting debut in the film. Jackson was one of 960 athletes who applied for one of 40 spots on the film's football squad. Director Peter Berg, reviewing the applications of the 260 applicants who made the cut for Allan Graf's tryout camp, auditioned Jackson on three different occasions before choosing the college gridiron star to act in his very first movie.

The 6'3", 225-lb. Jackson, a native of Longview, Texas, was a four-year letterman for the University of Texas, where he played in 44 career games (including 28 starts) as an outside linebacker and safety for the Longhorns. In the 2003 SBC Cotton Bowl, Jackson recorded the first fumble return touchdown in Cotton Bowl history with

his 46-yard score in the Longhorns' win over the L.S.U. Tigers. As a sophomore in 1999, Jackson was awarded the U.T. Outstanding Defensive Newcomer, was second on the team with 86 tackles and recorded a team-high 59 solo tackles. He was also a recipient of the University of Texas Community Service Award in 1999 and 2002.

Following graduation from U.T. in 2002, Jackson tried out for the NFL's Tennessee Titans, and recently signed to play for the Austin Wranglers in the Arena Football League, now in its 18th season (making it the second longest-running football league in U.S. sports history).

THE FILMMAKERS...

PETER BERG (Director / Screenplay by) is a prolific talent with a taste for challenging material, whether as a writer, director, producer or actor. He made his feature directorial debut (from his original script) on the cult classic *Very Bad Things*, starring Cameron Diaz, John Favreau and Christian Slater, and followed his big screen directorial bow with last year's action hit, *The Rundown*, starring The Rock, Seann William Scott and Christopher Walken.

Also in development is *The Kingdom*, a Michael Mann-produced political thriller set in Saudi Arabia to be written by Matthew Carnahan. Other Berg projects include *04 July*, a film featuring the heroic adventures of U.S. Coast Guard rescuers, and a New York fireman heist drama, *Truck 44*, both in active development.

Before stepping behind the camera, Berg gained considerable notice for his acting work in front of the cameras, particularly for his starring role opposite Linda Fiorentino in John Dahl's neo noir classic, *The Last Seduction*, winning critical acclaim for his portrayal of a naive local who falls for the seductive charms of Fiorentino's femme fatale.

Other notable film acting credits include James Mangold's independent drama *Cop Land*, whose all-star cast was toplined by Sylvester Stallone, Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel; *The Great White Hype*, opposite Samuel L. Jackson; Spike Lee's controversial *Girl 6*; Wes Craven's *Shocker*; *Late For Dinner*, with Marcia Gay Harden; Keith Gordon's *A Midnight Clear*; and *Fire in the Sky*. He most recently appeared in Michael Mann's thriller *Collateral*, starring Tom Cruise and Jamie Foxx.

For television, Berg created, wrote, produced and directed the ABC drama series *Wonderland*. He also wrote and directed episodes of David Kelley's critically acclaimed medical drama series, *Chicago Hope*, in which he also starred for three seasons as the cocky hockey-playing surgeon, Dr. Billy Kronk (winning SAG nominations in 1997 and 1998 as part of the series' ensemble cast). Most recently, he was seen in the recurring role of SD-6 Agent Noah Hicks on the ABC action series *Alias*.

The New York native's interest in performing was inspired as a child attending Broadway plays twice a month with his parents. He studied theater at Macalester College in Minneapolis, where he appeared in several theatrical productions, including *Flibberty Gibbet* and *Tartuffe*.

Academy Award®-winning producer **BRIAN GRAZER (Producer)** has been making movies and television programs for more than 20 years. As both a writer and producer, he has been personally nominated for three Academy Awards®, and in 2002 he won the Best Picture Oscar® for *A Beautiful Mind*. In addition to winning three other Academy Awards®, *A Beautiful Mind* also won four Golden Globe Awards (including Best Motion Picture Drama) and earned Grazer the first annual Awareness Award from the National Mental Health Awareness Campaign.

Over the years, Grazer's films and TV shows have been nominated for a total of 39 Oscars® and 42 Emmys. At the same time, his movies have generated more than \$11.2 billion in worldwide theatrical, music and video grosses. Reflecting this combination of commercial and artistic achievement, the Producers Guild of America honored Grazer with the David O. Selznick Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001. His accomplishments have also been recognized by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, which in 1998 added Grazer to the short list of producers with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

In addition to *A Beautiful Mind*, Grazer's films include *Apollo 13*, for which Grazer won the Producers Guild's Daryl F. Zanuck Motion Picture Producer of the Year Award as well as an Oscar® nomination for Best Picture of 1995; and *Splash*, which he co-wrote as well as produced and for which he received an Oscar® nomination for Best Original Screenplay of 1986.

Grazer's list of upcoming projects includes *Cinderella Man*, starring Russell Crowe and Renée Zellweger, directed by Ron Howard; *American Gangster*, starring Denzel Washington and Benicio Del Toro and directed by Antoine Fuqua; the animated *Curious George*, with the voice of Will Ferrell; the documentary *Inside Deep Throat*; the big screen adaptation of the international bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*, directed by Oscar®-winner Ron Howard; the comedy *Fun With Dick and Jane*, starring Jim Carrey; and the thriller *Flightplan*, with Jodie Foster in the lead.

Other feature film credits include *8 Mile*; *Blue Crush*; *The Missing*; *Intolerable Cruelty*; *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and *Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat*; *The Nutty Professor*; *Liar, Liar*; *Ransom*; *My Girl*; *Backdraft*; *Kindergarten Cop*; *Parenthood*; *Clean and Sober*; and *Spies Like Us*.

Grazer's television productions include Fox's *24* (receiving 8 Emmy nominations this year), Fox's *Arrested Development* (garnering 7 Emmy nominations), NBC's *Miss Match* and ABC's *The Big House*. His additional television credits include the WB's *Felicity*, ABC's *SportsNight*, as well as HBO's *From the Earth to the Moon*, for which he won the Emmy® for Outstanding Mini-Series.

Grazer began his career as a producer developing television projects. It was while he was executive-producing TV pilots for Paramount Pictures in the early 1980s that Grazer first met his longtime friend and business partner Ron Howard. Their collaboration began in 1985 with the hit comedies *Night Shift* and *Splash*, and in 1986 the two founded Imagine Entertainment, which they continue to run together as co-chairmen.

DAVID AARON COHEN (Screenplay by) launched his career with the 1991 movie mystery, *V.I. Warshawski*, which starred Kathleen Turner as the Chicago private eye based on the popular character created by Sara Paretsky.

The Chicago native went on to co-write the suspense thriller *The Devil's Own*, starring Harrison Ford and Brad Pitt, under the direction of Alan J. Pakula. This was the third screenplay Cohen wrote for Pakula. The first was the adaptation of a well-reviewed book about high school football in Texas (then in its first printing) called *Friday Night Lights*.

Cohen next penned the original script *Quantum Project*, the first film created exclusively for distribution on the internet. The landmark sci-fi thriller starred Stephen Dorff and John Cleese and marked the directorial debut of Oscar®-winning production designer Eugenio Zanetti (*Restoration*). Cohen captured a 2000 DBA Pixie Award for Best Screenplay for an I-Feature and the short (35 minute) film was also nominated for a Video Premiere Award.

David Aaron Cohen has worked for many of the top producers in Hollywood, among them Jerry Bruckheimer, Larry Gordon and Brian Grazer.

Most recently Cohen has expanded into television, writing and executive-producing a limited series for the Sci-Fi Channel, called *5 Days to Midnight*. The five-hour thriller aired in June of 2004, starring Timothy Hutton and Randy Quaid in what *The Hollywood Reporter* called “the best kind of science fiction drama.”

H. G. BISSINGER (Based on the Book by), one of the nation’s most honored and distinguished writers, has won the Pulitzer Prize, the Livingston Award, the National Headliner Award and the American Bar Association’s Silver Gavel (among nearly two dozen other national, state and local awards) for his reporting. He has also been a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

Remarkably varied in his writing skills, Bissinger has been a reporter at some of the nation’s most prestigious newspapers; a magazine writer with published work in *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times Magazine* and *Sports Illustrated*; an author with two highly acclaimed non-fiction books to his credit; and a co-producer and writer for the ABC television drama *NYPD Blue* (during the 2000-‘01 season).

A native of New York City, Bissinger graduated from Phillips Academy in 1972 and the University of Pennsylvania in 1976. He began his journalism career at the *Ledger-Star* in Norfolk, Virginia. He then moved to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and, later, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, where, in 1987, he and two other reporters won a Pulitzer Prize for their six-part investigative series on the Philadelphia court system. He later became an investigative journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*.

In 1988, Bissinger left the *Inquirer* and moved to Odessa, Texas, to write *Friday Night Lights*, a book about the impact of high school football on small-town life. The

book, published in 1990, spent 15 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list and has sold close to 700,000 copies in both hardcover and paperback. It was also named by *Sports Illustrated* as one of the Top Five books ever written about sports and the Number One book about football.

In 1992, Bissinger returned to Philadelphia to begin work on *A Prayer for the City*, where he was granted unprecedented access by Mayor Edward G. Rendell; the non-fiction book, five-and-one-half years in the making, garnered critical acclaim nationwide and was hailed as a classic on urban America.

Bissinger is a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair* magazine, where his range of subjects has included Pete Rose; the brutal killing of a gay soldier at an army barracks in Ft. Campbell, Kentucky; and the first in-depth profile of Los Angeles police detective Mark Fuhrman in the aftermath of the O. J. Simpson trial. Another of his features for the magazine, “Shattered Glass,” about young Washington journalist Stephen Glass, formed the basis for the highly acclaimed film *Shattered Glass*, written and directed by Billy Ray. He is also working in collaboration with St. Louis Cardinals Manager Tony La Russa on a book about the art and strategy of baseball, to be published by Houghton-Mifflin.

JAMES WHITAKER (Executive Producer) is President of Production of Imagine Entertainment, an award-winning entertainment conglomerate created by the prolific filmmaking team of Brian Grazer and Ron Howard.

Whitaker recently executive-produced Curtis Hanson’s hugely successful musical drama *8 Mile*, which netted the rapper Eminem an Academy Award® for Best Song. He also co-produced the Coen brothers’ screwball comedy *Intolerable Cruelty*, starring George Clooney, Catherine Zeta Jones and Billy Bob Thornton. He began at Imagine as an intern 11 years ago and, as one of the company’s key executives, he has also overseen production on such films as *Nutty Professor II* and *Life*, both starring Eddie Murphy.

The Georgetown University graduate began his career doing craft services on John Waters’ comedy, *Hairspray*, before becoming a documentary filmmaker. In this arena, he created socially conscious films to raise money for non-profit organizations,

including Best Buddies and Rebuilding Together. He graduated in 1993 from the Peter Stark program at U.S.C., earning a Master in Fine Arts.

JOHN CAMERON (Executive Producer) has enjoyed a lengthy association with the Coen brothers, first as an assistant director on *The Hudsucker Proxy* before graduating to co-producer on their Oscar®-winning hit *Fargo*, as well as *The Big Lebowski*, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, *The Man Who Wasn't There* and *Intolerable Cruelty*, the latter two with Billy Bob Thornton. Most recently, Cameron reunited with the Coens on *The Ladykillers* with Tom Hanks, and produced the irreverent comedy, *Bad Santa*, also starring Thornton and executive-produced by the Coens.

Cameron first met the sibling filmmakers while working with director Sam Raimi, a boyhood friend from Michigan. Cameron began working with Raimi and actor/producer Bruce Campbell in 1973 while the three were still in high school. After attending N.Y.U.'s film school, Cameron rejoined his two friends (together with producer Rob Tapert) for production of Raimi's first feature as director, the cult classic *The Evil Dead*.

Cameron subsequently worked as first assistant director on many of Raimi's films, including *Crimewave*, *Darkman*, *Army of Darkness* and *The Quick and the Dead*. He also served as assistant director on Richard Linklater's seminal film, *Dazed and Confused*, and Barry Sonnenfeld's comedy blockbuster, *Men in Black*. He also co-produced Wes Anderson's award-winning comedy *Rushmore*.

In addition to his producing credentials, Cameron has also directed episodes of the popular Raimi/Tapert-produced syndicated television series *Hercules* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*.

TOBIAS SCHLIESSLER (Director of Photography) reunites with director Peter Berg after their collaboration on last year's action hit, *The Rundown*.

The German native studied filmmaking at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. He began his career shooting documentaries such as *Close to Home*, then segued into music videos, independent features, television movies and commercials.

He was honored in consecutive years by the Association of Independent Commercial Producers (AICP) for his cinematography on two celebrated TV spots—in 2001 for Lincoln Financial’s spot, “Doctor,” and the previous year for Audi’s “Wake Up” commercial. Both are now part of the permanent archives of The Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) Department of Film and Video in New York City.

In addition to his commercial work (for such products as Lexus, Ford, AOL and AT&T) and music video photography (for such artists as Our Lady Peace and Sarah McLachlan), Schliessler has also compiled a lengthy list of credits on both the motion picture and television screens, including *Bait*, *The Guilty*, *Free Willy 3: The Rescue*, *Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh* and *Bulletproof Heart*.

His television work includes such telefilms as *Legalese*, *The Long Way Home*, *Outrage*, *The Escape*, *The Limbic Region*, *Mandela and de Klerk* and *Green Dolphin Beat*, among others.

SHARON SEYMOUR (Production Designer) most recently designed Terry Zwigoff’s irreverent hit comedy *Bad Santa*, starring Billy Bob Thornton. *Friday Night Lights* marks a reunion for Seymour and *Bad Santa* producers John Cameron and Sarah Aubrey.

Seymour, a Pennsylvania native, studied theater at Ithaca College in upstate New York, then earned her Masters in design from the American Film Institute. She began her career in New York theater, working as a set decorator, before making the transition into films. Her first project was as a props assistant on George Romero’s *Creepshow* before she graduated to art director on such films as *In a Shallow Grave*, *Johnny Be Good*, *Heart of Dixie* and John Schlesinger’s thriller, *Pacific Heights*.

She art directed Ben Stiller’s eponymous sketch comedy series, *The Ben Stiller Show*, for FOX-TV, and continued her collaboration with the comedic talent on his first two directorial efforts, *Reality Bites* and *The Cable Guy*. Her feature credits also include Roger Avery’s *Rules of Attraction*, *Novocaine*, *40 Days and 40 Nights*, *Duets*, *The Truth About Cats and Dogs*, *Molly* and *Don Juan DeMarco*.

In addition to Stiller's acclaimed Emmy-winning television show, Seymour's small screen credits include the telefilms *Miracle in the Wilderness* for TNT and *Hometown Boy Makes Good* for HBO.

In a career spanning almost three decades, film editor **DAVID ROSENBLOOM, A.C.E. (Editor)** has collaborated with such filmmakers as Mimi Leder (*Deep Impact, The Peacemaker, Pay It Forward*); Gregory Hoblit (*Hart's War, Frequency, Class of '61, Primal Fear*); David Anspaugh (*Moonlight and Valentino, the popular sports biopic Rudy, Fresh Horses, the telefilm In the Company of Darkness*); William Friedkin (*Blue Chips*); Roger Donaldson (*The Recruit*); and Michael Mann (*The Insider, sharing Oscar® and A.C.E. nominations with William Goldenberg and Paul Rubell*).

Other big-screen credits include *A Pyromaniac's Love Story, Best Seller* (his feature debut) and, most recently, the crime comedy *The Last Shot*. In addition to *Class of '61*, Rosenbloom's work for television includes the series pilots for NBC's *I'll Fly Away* (Emmy and A.C.E. nominations), *Equal Justice* and Mann's groundbreaking series, *Miami Vice*, as well as the telefilms *Do You Remember Love?* and *Under the Influence* (both earning him A.C.E. nominations as Best Edited Television Special). He has also directed episodes of *NYPD Blue, Melrose Place* and *Hill Street Blues*.

Raised in Los Angeles, Rosenbloom studied dramatic arts at U.C.L.A. During his student days, he first dabbled in animation editing before pursuing a career in the field. He secured an apprenticeship at Universal Pictures and worked his way up the ranks, becoming an assistant editor in 1976. He earned his first credit in 1981 on NBC's long-running hit series, *Hill Street Blues*, and received his first A.C.E. Eddie nomination for his episodic work in 1983.

SUSAN MATHESON (Costume Designer) created the wardrobes for director John Stockwell's feature films *Blue Crush* and *crazy/beautiful*. Her additional credits include *Dancer, Texas Pop. 81, Best Laid Plans, Panic, Highway, Max Keeble's Big Move* and, most recently, *Honey* (starring Jessica Alba) and the upcoming *A Piece of My Heart*.

The South African native studied drama at Vassar College where she segued into costume design. She continued those studies in Japan before moving to Los Angeles, where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Otis Parsons Institute of Design. She won design awards from Nike, Bob Mackie and in 1992, was named Designer of the Year by the Institute. After a year of teaching illustration and design at Otis, she went on to design Barbie Dolls for Mattel and assorted toy characters for Disney.

Hailing from the burgeoning art scene of Austin, Texas, **EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY (Original Music by)** are some of the most sincere folks you will ever meet. Aside from being nice guys, they play some of the most passionate, powerful instrumental music you will ever hear. Equal parts romance and tragedy, their beautiful washes of melody have the tendency to ignite into head-spinning walls of noise. Possibly the loudest live band ever, their sound proves to be every bit as triumphant as their name implies.

Previously, the band—namely Mark Smith, Michael James, Munaf Rayani and Christopher Hrasky—also provided original scoring for two independent films from writer/director Kat Candler: *The Absence of Wings* and *Cicadas*. Explosions composed the score for *Friday Night Lights* by combining newly re-recorded music from their two albums, *The Earth Is Not a Cold Dead Place* and *Those Who Tell The Truth Shall Die, Those Who Tell The Truth Shall Live Forever*, with original composed score material to create a tailor-made tapestry for the film set in Odessa—the sister city to Midland, Texas, the birthplace of three of the four band members.

The man behind the music for Sofia Coppola's Academy Award®-winning *Lost in Translation*, composer/producer/music conceptualist **BRIAN REITZELL (Music Producer)** has almost single-handedly validated a new approach to the manner in which music is set to film. His resume includes *The Virgin Suicides*, starring Kirsten Dunst, and *CQ*, starring Jeremy Davies. He currently is working on independently produced character study *Thumbsucker* from filmmaker Mike Mills and starring Keanu Reeves, Tilda Swinton and Vincent D'Onofrio. Prior to Reitzell's work in film music, he was an

integral part of both the Atlantic Records distributed band Redd Kross and the late 1990s electronic French group Air as drummer in both with releases in the U.S. and abroad.

On the immediate horizon for Reitzell is another collaboration with lauded director Sofia Coppola on her upcoming film, *Marie Antoinette*, with Kirsten Dunst and Jason Schwartzman in starring roles. *Marie Antoinette* is slated to begin filming in February, 2005.

ALLAN GRAF (Second Unit Director / Stunt Coordinator) is one of Hollywood's premiere second-unit directors and stunt coordinators whose 30-year career behind the cameras includes the staging of stunts in over five dozen films while directing second-unit action on two dozen features, including Richard Donner's recent time-travel adventure, *Timeline*; Randall Wallace's Vietnam War epic, *We Were Soldiers* (World Stunt Award nomination); Brian Helgeland's unique medieval adventure, *A Knight's Tale*; and several projects with veteran filmmaker Walter Hill (*Last Man Standing*, *Trespass*, *Johnny Handsome* and *Another 48 Hrs.*, on which Graf was the first to design and execute one of Hollywood's most unique stunts—a cannon roll of a bus).

A native of Southern California, Graf first made his mark on the gridiron, where he captained the 1967 San Fernando High School city championship team, winning All-American honors. He won a full athletic scholarship to the University of Southern California and played offensive guard for John McKay's powerhouse Trojans. Graf started on McKay's legendary, undefeated (12-0) 1972 NCAA National Championship team and was one of the heroes at the 1973 Rose Bowl, when U.S.C. defeated Ohio State. He next played in the 1973 college all-star game against the NFL's Miami Dolphins at Chicago's Soldier Field.

Following graduation, Graf became a free agent with the Los Angeles Rams before joining the World Football League's Portland Storm during their inaugural 1974 season. When the league abruptly folded, Graf tackled a new arena when he fatefully won a role as former Chicago Bears player Dick Butkus' stunt double in the 1976 Disney film *Gus*, a comic opus about a field-goal kicking mule.

Graf worked as a stunt player for several years on a variety of projects, notably, Hill's *Southern Comfort*, *The Driver* and *The Long Riders*, as well as *They Live*, *Total*

Recall, Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, Raising Arizona, Action Jackson and, more recently, *S.W.A.T., Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* and *Independence Day*. He has coordinated stunts on several other projects, including *Punch Drunk Love, Domestic Disturbance, Supernova, Geronimo: An American Legend, Wild Bill, Wayne's World* and *Broken Arrow*. He has also logged several supporting acting roles in such projects as *L.A. Confidential, Poltergeist, The Replacements, Thirteen Days, Magnolia, The Limey, The Doors, Another 48 Hrs., RoboCop* and *Boogie Nights*, among dozens of others.

The former college football great is also one of Hollywood's best known pigskin choreographers and second-unit directors, designing and staging the gridiron action for such films as Oliver Stone's *Any Given Sunday*, Howard Deutch's *The Replacements, The Program, The Waterboy, Necessary Roughness*, the recent action-comedy *Cheer Up* and Cameron Crowe's Oscar®-nominated classic, *Jerry Maguire*.

Graf recently penned an original screenplay entitled *Turning the Tide*, a football drama which depicts the historic 1970 gridiron contest between McKay's U.S.C. Trojans and Bear Bryant's Crimson Tide. The film is currently in development.

-friday night lights-