

SOUTHEAST MISSOURIAN

Jackson native Nick Murphy returns to area to produce nostalgic short film

By Marybeth Niederkorn ~ Southeast Missourian
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From left to right, Charley Schoen, Nick Murphy, A.J. Koehler and Reggie A. Brown pose for a photo outside what remains of the old Jackson Skate Center.

Laura Simon

Nick Murphy has come a long way from "Mortal Kombat."

The independent filmmaker and Jackson native started out in high school, when, with a hand-held VHS camcorder in his grandmother's backyard, Murphy and a buddy acted out scenes from the "Mortal Kombat" video game, dressed in costumes his grandmother had made for the shoot.

Murphy has made several more short films under his production company, Spoon Pictures, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary next year. While he was still living in Jackson, two of his films were added to the rental pool at Main Street Video, which he said was "the coolest thing in the world for us."

Murphy moved to Los Angeles to go to film school and has spent the last 19 years or so making and promoting short films on a budget.

That budget was one of the main considerations Murphy had when he decided to bring his upcoming film, "All Nite Skate," back to Jackson.



From left to right, Charley Schoen, Nick Murphy, AJ Koehler and Reggie A. Brown pose for a photo outside what remains of the old Jackson Skate Center.

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Nostalgia played a factor too, of course, he said.

The Jackson Skate Center was central to Murphy's teenage experience, he said, and producer A.J. Koehler was another former "rink rat."

Koehler said she met her future husband at the rink, and for that and many other reasons, the rink and Murphy's film vision appeal to her.

Murphy, for his part, said this film is his version of "The Breakfast Club."

In the semi-autobiographical story, the main character, Nick, is a DJ at the local skating rink the summer before high-school graduation in the late 1990s.

"He has to make a choice," Murphy said.

"All of the characters wrestle with that," Murphy said, adding he thinks the themes are pretty universal.

"People might not have gone to the rink, but the bowling alley, other places," Murphy said.

Being back in Jackson for a preproduction trip has been pretty wild, Murphy said.

The film has been in preproduction in Los Angeles since March, he said, but there were two problems: budget and trying to make L.A. feel like small-town Missouri.

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"This is DIY filmmaking," Murphy said. "We improvise."

But improvising wasn't working as well as he wanted it to. So, Murphy said, the production crew came to a realization.

"We could take this to Jackson," Murphy said.

He was unsure at first about his support network in town, Murphy said. He's been in L.A. for a long time, and he thought Jackson might not be as receptive as he hoped.

So he started making phone calls.

"Almost everyone I talked to, first thing they asked me, 'What can we do to help you?'" Murphy said.

More than anything, he said, that showed him he'd made the right decision.

Bob Schooley, owner of The Ground-a-Bout in uptown Jackson and president of the Uptown Jackson Revitalization Organization, was a school friend of Murphy's, and, Murphy said, was excited to help.

Murphy said he spoke to city clerk Mary Lowry, who knows his family.

Murphy and Koehler met with Jackson Mayor Dwain Hahs, city administrator Jim Roach and public-works director Rodney Bollinger on Monday morning, and that evening, the made a presentation to the board of aldermen at its regular meeting.

"We're coming back home to where it all started, to make a short film about the old Jackson Skate Center," Murphy said.

The skate center became a flea market several years ago, fell into disrepair, and most of it was torn down in 2015, Murphy said, so "obviously we can't film there." A skating rink in Puxico, Missouri, will stand in, he said.

But as for the rest of the shots, Murphy said, they'd like to shoot several in town and include one long shot of the main character driving through uptown.

"We want to show as cinematically as possible how beautiful Jackson is," Murphy said, and to do that, they'll need to block off some streets while filming is in progress.

The main concern is safety, Murphy said, to avoid distracting passing drivers. The production will be insured, Murphy said, and Koehler added there will be a medic on set.

Authenticity of the shot is another point, he added.

"The movie is set in the 1990s, so it needs to be period accurate," Murphy said, with cars from the 1970s, '80s and '90s and 30 to 35 background actors dressed in period-accurate clothing.

Koehler said they hope to be finished shooting by 2 p.m. that day and are shooting for a Friday in May 2018.

Hahs said Bollinger can approve street closures as part of his duties as public-works director, "but we thought we should bring it before the council as well."

Roach said they felt a head-nod from the board of aldermen would be good.

The board made an official motion to allow necessary street closures, which passed unanimously.

Murphy said he's excited to continue preproduction, making arrangements and getting people into place.

"We're considering an open casting call," he said, but at this point, it hasn't been determined yet.

Principal actors will be cast in L.A., Murphy said, and other actors in Missouri will be needed for background roles and potentially speaking roles as well.

The film is being financed through a not-for-profit, Fractured Atlas, Murphy said, and at this

point, they're seeking donors.

"Any donation over \$1 is tax-deductible," Murphy said.

"We will start with the minimum," Murphy said of the financing.

"It's a 30-minute film, but hopefully will feel bigger than that," Murphy said. Between the scope and the preproduction work they're putting into the film, he said, he's hoping for the big cinematic feel of a larger production.

But for now, he's hoping to borrow some of Jackson's community spirit for his indie film.

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