

## A Reel Education

“When we arrived in Uganda, we had never seen anything like it before,” said Frank Mobilio Jr., 23, of Wantage, NJ. “We wanted to film everything. We were trigger-happy with the camera.” Mobilio recently returned to the United States after an eight-day trip to Kampala, Uganda, among other small towns outside of the capital city. The green landscape with red dirt roads, the extraordinary bird life and an occasional monkey, and the people of Uganda were all attractive to Mobilio’s lens. However, the purpose of the trip to Uganda was not to simply record memories, but rather to tell a success story.

Mobilio, along with Sean Legnini of Philadelphia, PA, and Peter Keeling of Mendham, NJ, were commissioned to create three short documentary clips for ECHOES Around the World, a nonprofit organization that evolved through the work of Reverend David Serunjogi and his wife, Sarah. The Ugandan pair opened Trinity Children’s Centre, an elementary school, in 1986 in Kampala and Centenary High School in 1998 in Masaka.

With Legnini acting as the producer, Keeling as the director, and Mobilio as the cinematographer, the crew shot just under 4,000 minutes of video. Their film will be edited down to a 10 to 15 minute documentary about the work that ECHOES has accomplished so far. Two separate, shorter clips, 3 to 5 minutes each, will be taken from the larger piece to highlight the distinct successes of the two schools and the medical center, which opened in 2007.

When Mobilio was growing up in Sussex County, New Jersey, he did not know that his education would lead him to study film or create a documentary in Uganda. Always interested in math and the sciences, Mobilio never considered filmwork as a career until he began taking Media Technology and American Film courses at High Point Regional High School. Mobilio realized that he could make a career out of his passion for camerawork and film editing. “I didn’t consider film as a career until a classmate made me think it would be okay,” Mobilio said.

When Mobilio was accepted into Emerson College in Boston, MA, he thought that he would be most interested in studying film editing. “At High Point, our resources and equipment were limited, so editing was where you had the chance to really be creative. We would spend hours and hours during study hall, after school, and in class trying to perfect our two minute projects.” Once at Emerson, however, Mobilio had the chance to help out on a movie set with a classmate. “I thought it was the coolest thing—all



the lights and cameras—it was like a bunch of toys. Being on set became what I was more interested in,” he said. He went on to receive a BA in Film Production along with a minor in Photography.

At Emerson, Mobilio also met Legnini and Keeling. Legnini had traveled to Uganda and done work for ECHOES in the past, so when the organization asked Legnini to create a film, he asked Mobilio and Keeling for their help. Though Mobilio is ultimately interested in working on the set of narrative feature films, he was excited to take on traditional documentary-style filmwork. “Documentaries are a lot of fun, and different, and they take you to places you otherwise wouldn’t have the chance to go. In Uganda, we interviewed the heads of schools, the doctors and some students. They told us what they’ve done so far, what ECHOES has done for them, some of the challenges that are holding them back, and what they hope to accomplish in the future.”

Reflecting on his own childhood and education in Sussex County, Mobilio was struck by the poverty and the limitations that students in Uganda face. “The public schools there are so primitive,” he said. “There is no electricity, no running water, few books, no computers. Most of the teachers never went to college. What they are trying to do at Trinity Children’s Centre and Centenary High School is set up a place where these kids can go to get a decent education.”

At times, it was difficult to not record the struggles of the students and teachers at the public schools. But Mobilio and the crew challenged themselves to focus on the positive work that ECHOES has done. “There was a temptation to capture the poverty, the sadness—but that was not the mission of the video. We didn’t want the video to be a sympathy piece. We wanted to have more hope and to show how far ECHOES has come,” Mobilio said.

Mobilio is currently living and working in Los Angeles, CA, as a freelance cameraman. ●