

# UNCOMMON COMMON SENSE

THE PGA'S "PROTECT YOUR TEAM" WORKSHOP DEBUTS IN ATLANTA

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER HAIRE

**"NO... NO. WE NEED A STUNT MAN,"**

producer/director John Boorman told actor Burt Reynolds on the set of *Deliverance*. Reynolds had volunteered to do the stunt himself in a scene where his character Lewis rides his canoe over a waterfall. "We'll just use a dummy! We'll just throw a dummy over," Boorman insisted. A young Reynolds fought to do the stunt himself and as expected, it led to injury. Boorman was at his bedside when he woke. "How'd it look?" Reynolds asked. "It looked like a dummy falling over a waterfall" replied Boorman.

Producer Mark Shelton shared this infamous story with over 75 members of the Georgia film & television

community at the inaugural Producers Guild of America "Protect Your Team" Safety Task Force event on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017. "What does it mean to be safe?" Addressing this question, the event was designed for producing team members to empower them with the knowledge to be leading advocates for production safety. A safe production starts at the top.

The event was hosted at Eagle Rock Studios just outside of Atlanta, thanks to PGA Member and Eagle Rock Studios VP of Studio Operations Beth Talbert. Via a discussion-based format, four production safety experts led producers through recommended practices for developing a safety plan, highlighting the producer's



IATSE's Kent Jorgensen addresses a packed house at Eagle Rock Studios.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN THORNTON



role as part of the safety team, as well as how to recognize and correct hazards. The event likewise included a thorough briefing on support resources available locally. The goal: to keep producers, cast and crew safe on the set. Speakers included IATSE Safety Committee Chair Kent Jorgensen; Contract Services Vice President for Production Affairs and Safety, Matt Antonucci (along with Jorgensen, also a Co-Chair of the Industry-Wide Labor-Management Safety Committee); Margaret Burke, the Regional Director of Production Safety for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox; and independent producer and OSHA-authorized safety instructor Mark Shelton. Representatives from the community, including Jenny Houlroyd of the Georgia Tech Research Institute as well as Trish Taylor from the Georgia Production Partnership, contributed to the conversation.

Despite being the latest critical buzzword, safety is not a new topic for the entertainment industry. The Industry-Wide Labor-Management Safety Committee was formed in 1965 and is comprised of guild, union, and management representatives active in industry safety and health programs. They are responsible for researching, writing and making available the Safety Bulletins, seen attached to callsheets on many productions. These bulletins are recommended guidelines for safe practices on a set and cover both overarching concepts such as general safety as well as more specific high-hazard departments such as working with helicopters and airplanes.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was established in 1971 as a result of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. A part of the US Department of Labor, OSHA is tasked with assuring safe and healthful working conditions by setting and enforcing standards for all employers and their workers, including producers of film and television. Many Safety Bulletins have OSHA standards at their core and blend entertainment industry practices with government standards for a safe workplace.

In the 1970s, Contract Services Administration Trust Fund (CSATF) was created as way to help educate filmmaking craftsmen and women through various programs for the motion picture and television industry. Around the mid 1990s, the studios of the AMPTP, as part of their

collective bargaining agreement with IATSE and other entertainment craft organizations, created a voluntary safety program through CSATF. It wasn't until the mid 2000's that Contract Services required a mandatory safety training program for IATSE signatory productions. The Safety Pass program was created in collaboration with the Industry-Wide Labor-Management Safety Committee "as a means of addressing the OSHA requirements that employees be trained (and the training documented) in the safe use of equipment and work practices on their job." IATSE crew employed on signatory productions are required to take these special courses before they can be employed.

However, there is a substantial knowledge gap between the trained union crews and members of the producing community. The PGA saw the need for safety education for producers and their teams, addressing the issues from the producer's perspective. On any production, it is vital that the cast and crew know that the producer is looking out for them and their well-being. They want to trust the person they are working for and know that they will not be unknowingly put in harm's way. Union crews have been trained to recognize hazardous situations; would you recognize one on your set? Do you know how to protect your team? Members of the PGA Atlanta chapter do.

Safety demands can seem daunting. How can you know all of the laws and proper safety

From left: PGA Safety Task Force Co-Chair Jennifer Haire, event speaker Margaret Burke, PGA Safety Task Force Co-Chair Melissa Friedman, PGA Atlanta Co-Chair Scott Thigpen, event speakers Kent Jorgensen, Matt Antonucci, Mark Shelton



PGA ATLANTA: THE ORIGIN STORY

It was a November evening in 2009, when a handful of producers found themselves in the backroom of Manuel's Tavern, an Atlanta institution where politicians, journalists and artists have been gathering since 1956. We came together that night at the request of our colleague, Tom Cappello, who pitched us the idea of starting a PGA chapter right here in the very heart of the South. Tom went onto say there was a fellow by the name of Vance who was coming to town who could explain things further. Soon after, we found ourselves listening, beers in hand, while Vance Van Petten expounded on the benefits of PGA membership and the virtues of becoming a part of this national organization. He explained that the PGA's mission was to protect and promote people just like us. We ate it up, hungry for the camaraderie and professional support. Weeks later, many of us met again and filled out our PGA applications together. And by April 2010, the vetting was completed and the charter members of the PGA Atlanta chapter had been accepted into the Guild. We had become something; we just didn't fully know what...yet. There were less than a dozen of us. The start was slow going at first, but we eventually found our way, with guidance from Mitzie Rothzied in the PGA East office, and through the encouragement of visiting members like Nelle Nugent, Gale Anne Hurd and Lydia Dean Pilcher. In the years since, we have elected chapter officers, formed committees, and organized many outstanding events, including the "Protect Your Team" safety workshop. Today, the Atlanta chapter is 100 members strong with a steady stream of networking opportunities, educational



workshops and panel discussions. And like the rest of the production community in Atlanta, we see boundless opportunities ahead. — SCOTT THIGPEN

measures for every possible situation all the time? In short, hire an expert, use common sense and plan for Murphy. A basic understanding of how to recognize and correct an unsafe situation is essential knowledge for a responsible producer to make reasonable decisions. Are you shooting exteriors on a hot day? Provide shade and water. Are you working on roadways? Set up lane closures and provide reflective vests. Are there local poisonous indigenous critters in abundance? Hire a removal company to clear the area you are filming. The script takes place at sea? Hire a

marine coordinator to handle the logistics. Need the character to ride a canoe over a waterfall? For God's sake, use a dummy instead. Production is a training ground for adapting to constant change. No two days are the same. Plan for everything to go right; be prepared for it all to go wrong. A typical production day goes in a direction you didn't expect. Have a safety plan for change. Develop your eye for safety and encourage your cast and crew to bring their concerns to your attention. The PGA Safety Task force has compiled an ongoing list of helpful resource and

information links, available on the Guild's website at [producersguild.org/page/Safety](http://producersguild.org/page/Safety). The "Protect Your Team" seminar was additionally sponsored by MBS Equipment Co., Crazy Legs Productions and Decide Dekalb and was produced by PGA Atlanta Chapter Vice Chair Scott Thigpen as well as Melissa Friedman and Jennifer Haire, Co-Chairs of the PGA Safety Task Force. The PGA Safety Task Force is currently developing a follow up program with an additional emphasis on doc/non-fiction/reality programming to be held second quarter 2017. ■