

NEWS

Association for Healthcare Philanthropy

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AHP and The Ultimate Gift Experience Release Official Film Production Notes

WASHINGTON, D.C., (November 29, 2005) – Jason Stevens has a very simple relationship with his billionaire grandfather, Howard “Red” Stevens. He hates him. The only inheritance he wants is cold, hard cash and lots of it. When Red dies, Jason gets a big surprise: he’s the only member of the family who is not getting anything - at least not yet. Wanting to make amends for spoiling his family materially but failing to invest personally in their lives, Red singles out his grandson to receive “the ultimate gift,” but only after Jason completes a 12-month quest to find the meaning of life beyond financial gain. Faced with the choice of walking away or accepting the challenge, one thing is certain, Jason’s life will be changed forever.

MICHAEL O. SAJBEL directs *The Ultimate Gift*, a drama based on James Stovall’s best-selling book by the same name, starring DREW FULLER (WB’s *Charmed*), BILL COBBS (*The Bodyguard*), ABIGAIL BRESLIN (*Signs*), ALI HILLIS (*Must Love Dogs*) and MIRCEA MONROE (*Borderland*), with LEE MERIWETHER (*Gone Postal*), BRIAN DENNEHY (*Death of a Salesman*) and a special appearance by JAMES GARNER (*The Notebook*).

Connecting People • Enriching Lives

The *Ultimate Gift* is an independent production from The *Ultimate Gift*, LLC, in association with Dean River Productions. It has a screenplay by CHERYL MCKAY and MICHAEL O. SAJBEL. It is produced by RICK ELDRIDGE, JOHN SHEPHERD and CLEVE LANDSBERG with executive producers RICK ELDRIDGE and DAVE ROSS. The cinematographer is BRIAN BAUGH; the production designer is STEPHEN STORER; and the costume designer is JANE ANDERS.

The *Ultimate Gift* is set in Charlotte, Texas and the jungles of Ecuador, but the entire film is being shot in the Charlotte area. Filming began on October 14 at the Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens where a dense kudzu covered forest had been transformed with tropical plants, thatched roof huts, goats, chickens and a World War II era U.S. Army Jeep. The *Ultimate Gift* is scheduled for release in theaters in November 2006.

“The *Ultimate Gift* is a legacy story,” says Eldridge. “It’s a story that people relate to and from which they can learn valuable lessons. While the book focuses largely on Red Stevens, the movie will focus more on Jason and how the quest transforms him. Jason’s is a compelling story.”

Drew Fuller plays Jason, a 24-year old “trust fund baby” who has never worked a day in his life; veteran actor James Garner portrays billionaire Red Stevens who has bankrolled the lives of everyone in his dysfunctional family; Bill Cobbs plays Red’s best friend and lawyer, Ted Hamilton;

Abigail Breslin is the spirited but gravely ill nine year old Emily; Ali Hillis portrays Alexia, Emily's mother, a beautiful, single mom who is a nurse's assistant; Lee Meriwether plays Miss Hastings, Hamilton's long-time assistant; Brian Dennehy portrays Gus, Red's long-time Texas friend; and Mircea Monroe plays Caitlin, Jason's incredibly beautiful, gold digging girlfriend.

Jim Stovall's novel, *The Ultimate Gift*, has sold over two million copies and has been translated into more than 15 languages with distribution in 14 countries. A compelling story that has captivated the hearts of young and old alike, Stovall, blind since age 29, transcribed the book in five short days.

Bringing *The Ultimate Gift* to the Big Screen

Stovall, the author of *The Ultimate Gift*, played a big role in getting the screenplay written. "Books can change ideas, but films can change cultures," continues Stovall. "The current generation receives their information, training, wisdom, from movies. They are affected by what's on the screen, so it was very important to me, as we go about getting the message of *The Ultimate Gift* out, that we make sure that we have it in a movie form."

Within ten days of letting an option lapse, Stovall received a call from Rick Eldridge, executive producer of *Bobby Jones - Stroke of Genius*. He had been given a copy of *The Ultimate Gift* by his son and thought it would make a great movie. Eldridge asked Stovall what he was looking for. "I told him," remembers Stovall, "that I was looking for a film that, when someone walks up the aisle after having seen the movie, they have the exact same experience that someone had when they turned that last page of the book."

Eldridge felt certain that he and his team could produce a script that would please the author. "From the very beginning," continues Eldridge, "we involved Jim in the process, making him part of the writing team with our script writer. He maintained creative ownership of the whole process. The beauty of the book is that it leaves room to go deeper inside each character as well as a lot of room to go wider with some of the illustrations that revolve around the gifts. It's like an outline just waiting to become a screenplay."

"Cheryl McKay was brought on board and she gave the story 'heart' with compelling emotion...Michael Sajbel deepened the development of the main characters and put 'flesh on the bones' so to speak. Both were very important in the transition from a rather episodic book to a strong dramatic three act script. The secret to our approvals with Jim was simply involving him in the creative process with discussions and notes on the various drafts of the script."

On the heels of a good working relationship on *Bobby Jones - Stroke of Genius*, Eldridge and The Film Foundry approached Dean River Productions to produce *The Ultimate Gift*. "Some of the same team was going to be reassembled, which was fantastic," says producer John Shepherd. "We loved the fact that the story was filled with great characters and the challenge of creating Ecuador and Texas in the Carolinas was something we'd never experienced. But what really drew us in was the message of the film - 'what are you going to leave behind? Is it going to be a big pile of money or is it going to be a legacy?' Dean River Productions has a simple formula," continues Shepherd. "To inspire and entertain."

We look at this as the opportunity to influence others to make a positive change in society and personally in the way they live and how they value what's important which, I think, is relationships.

Film media is the church of the masses. It has the opportunity to influence generations to come, and it's got a pretty long shelf life."

Bringing the book to life on the screen fell to Michael O. Sajbel, who had known and worked with Shepherd for ten years. "Michael Sajbel is the consummate storyteller," says Shepherd. The Ultimate Gift had to be adapted to the screen and after we got the first draft, Michael said, 'We need to get closer to what Jim Stovall started with. Let's find a way to make the story accessible instead of just a 12 step program of great lessons.' His vision to make it dramatic, compelling and a visual feast, with drama and conflict is what really got Michael the job." Sajbel had read the book and knew that he wanted to direct the film before the producers interviewed him for the job. "I wanted to direct The Ultimate Gift because it seemed like a heart warming story of a very spoiled young man, coming of age and learning what's really valuable in life. I liked the idea of shooting what you might call a serious film with comedic elements or a comic film with serious elements. I like that blend.

"The biggest challenge that I faced in bringing The Ultimate Gift to the screen was translating the book from 12 gifts in 12 chapters into a traditional motion picture. Books explain a lot of things for you and your imagination takes over," he continues. "In a movie, you have to put it into a three act structure and show the audience the story. I was inspired by Cheryl McKay's intuitive work as well as returning to the book to conform the screenplay to my vision for the film in subsequent rewrites."

Actor Drew Fuller finds Jason Stevens a complex character. "At the beginning, he's so difficult," he explains. "He's so self-centered that he doesn't care what he gives to life. It's about what life can give to him. He's always been given all the money he wanted and was expected to solve all of his problems with it. When he's put into a situation where he has to prove his worth, he decides to accept the challenge to see what's at the end of the journey and, in the process he finds himself and comes out on the other end - a better person...just as his grandfather had hoped he would. Drew is captivated with the role of Jason. "There's so much change that enables me to start at one place and end up on the other side of the world, with a beautiful journey throughout."

Financing for the Film...

Formed in 2004 as a limited liability partnership between Eldridge, Jim Stovall, Boston based consulting company, The Legacy Companies and The Helixx Group, The Ultimate Gift Experience, LLC (TUGX),* was established to enhance and extend the powerful message delivered in Jim Stovall's novel, The Ultimate Gift. The company consists of two related ventures, a product and services division and a movie production division. (Additional information can be found at www.tugx.com.)

Houston-based financial services company, Stanford Financial Group,** has provided the financing for The Ultimate Gift movie production and outreach initiatives. "We are extremely proud to help bring this touching, life-changing story to the screen," says James M. Davis, Director and Chief Financial Officer for the Stanford Group of Companies. "For over 70 years, Stanford has been committed to strengthening every single community that we serve. This book and film are grand examples of how commitment, dedication and stewardship can truly change the world."

The Ultimate Gift will come to the big screen with an endorsement from the 29,000-member Financial Planning Association.*** The premise for the TUGX/FPA alliance is the novel which provides readers with an enlightened view of the non-financial aspects of wealth and how their

alignment with financial wealth resources lead to a more fulfilled life and a powerful legacy left to others. Additional plans include the development of products and services targeted to financial planning professionals for their ongoing work with clients in the areas of wealth creation, wealth distribution and establishing a meaningful legacy.

TUGX has also formed an alliance with The Association for Healthcare Philanthropy (AHP),**** who will use the story of The Ultimate Gift to promote philanthropy in North America's not-for-profit health care institutions.

"Individuals are looking for more from their advisors today, a much more meaningful relationship," says Tom Kennedy, TUGX president and former vice president of marketing for The Legacy Companies. "TUGX, its message and supporting products and services provide a vehicle to help facilitate a higher level of dialogue, one that is centered around an individual's most important asset - their life and those experiences that have shaped the fabric of who they are. It is unprecedented at this level to bring together the financial services and philanthropic communities around a major motion picture."

*The Ultimate Gift Experience (TUGX) is a product and service company formed to leverage and further develop the powerful message delivered in Jim Stovall's novel, The Ultimate Gift. TUGX seeks to stimulate a personal and cultural transformation through which individuals, families and communities all over the world develop a deepened or renewed understanding of the fact that their lives, and the people, events and experiences that shape it, are their most important and precious assets.

**The Stanford Group is a global network of affiliated financial companies headed by Chairman and CEO R. Allen Stanford. Although independent, the affiliated companies together provide coordinated wealth management through international private banking, asset management, investment advisory services, trust administration, commercial banking, real estate development and insurance for clients worldwide.

***FPA is the membership organization for the financial planning community with over 28,000 members. Its members are dedicated to supporting the financial planning process in order to help people reach their goals and dreams. FPA is at the heart of financial planning, connecting those who deliver financial planning with those who support it and benefit from it.

****Established in 1967, AHP is a not-for-profit organization whose 4,000 + members manage philanthropic programs in 1,900 of the nations' 3,400 not-for-profit health care providers. AHP members raised more than \$7 billion in 2004.

Related news release: AHP and The Ultimate Gift Experience Join Forces

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