

ABOUT THE PRINCIPALS

PHIL VISCHER (Written by/Produced by/Tomato) was eight years old when he made his first animated film. By age 14, his career was carved in celluloid. After a stint in Bible College, his quest to integrate faith and filmmaking had led to a tomato and a cucumber.

In 1991, Phil was 25 and newly married with no financial backing and no idea how his vegetable characters would get onto the world counter, *er*, stage. Seventeen years later, 52 million VeggieTales videos occupy shelves and video players in more than one third of all American homes with young children.

In 2003, Phil's original company, Big Idea Productions, was dissolved. Today Phil consults with VeggieTales' new owner, Big Idea, Inc. He also has a new company Jellyfish Labs, to develop new ways to engage audiences in faith through storytelling.

Phil wrote ***The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything—A VeggieTales Movie*** in 2003. And while Phil's ***Pirates*** script predates *other* contemporary Hollywood pirate movies, characteristically he combines bumbling heroes with lasting truth.

"Everyone wants to be a hero," Phil explains. "As soon as we can walk, we're strapping on capes, picking up swords and swinging to the rescue. But as we grow older, we learn that being a hero in the *real* world is much more complicated. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? What's really worth fighting for? And how can I have time to be a hero when I really just need to figure out how to pay my mortgage?"

In the vacuum for heroes, Phil says, we follow sports, music, and business icons. "But they've learned the art of appearing heroic without actually rescuing anyone from anything."

Like most of us in real life, Phil's leading characters in ***Pirates*** aspire to modern fake heroics. Fortunately, someone has a plan for our veggies bigger than anything they could imagine.

"Just when their pursuit of fake heroism seems bleakest, a strange message calls them into an adventure too big for any stage," Phil said. "This adventure shows them that with the calling and equipping, and a commitment to doing what's right, even when it's hard, they can be exactly what they've always longed to be."

In summary, *Pirates'* highly creative creator says, "God has an adventure for you. If you respond to his call, He'll give you everything you need to be the hero you've always longed to be.

Phil lives with his wife Lisa (*a.k.a.* Junior Asparagus) and their three kids in Wheaton IL.

MIKE NAWROCI (Directed by/Larry the Cucumber) *is* Larry the Cucumber, and Larry the Cucumber is Mike—so say all who work with them both. They'll also tell you that Mike, who carries the mental vision of every frame of every scene, is resolute, a joy to work with, and a master in bringing out the talent around him.

Long before VeggieTales, Mike Nawrocki was a globetrotter before he was old enough for a driver's license. The trick is having a father in the Air Force. And after starting life in Dayton, Ohio, Mike proceeded to grow up in D.C., California, Colorado, and Japan. After high school, to supplement his informal education in world cultures, he attended Crown College in Minnesota, then the University of Illinois at Chicago where he earned a BS in biology and a BA in history.

Every college student needs money, and while attending school in Chicago, Mike took entry-level work at a video post-production house. He also helped start a side project with a friend from Crown—a little homespun collaboration with Phil Vischer that ultimately would become VeggieTales.

In 1994, Mike joined Big Idea full time, proceeding to create, write, and direct most of the extremely popular Silly Songs with Larry and VeggieTales segments. In the humor column, Mike is the silly factor, and much of the physical humor traces directly to an extra lobe in his brain. His first full feature, as a writer, was the popular *Madam Blueberry*. He has written and directed several VeggieTales episodes, developed and wrote the first three episodes of 321 Penguins.

"From the beginning, we wanted to help parents pass along biblical values," Mike explains. "Our view as we tell a story is that there's a God who made us and loves us and wants to have a relationship with us. Sometimes we tell a Bible story and

sometimes we do retakes on classic literature or spoofs of a popular film genre. Our basic idea always is storytelling from a biblical worldview.”

The result? “The result is that kids gain more interest in the Bible. That’s our hope, our goal. We’re talking about the God who created us and wants to help us live our lives. That’s an important lesson for a child to learn and one that many parents want to pass along to their kids. That’s what we mean by calling VeggieTales an entertaining resource for parents.”

Away from the set, Mike lives in Franklin TN with his wife, Lisa, and their two children.

KURT HEINECKE (music director) knows well that whether the music is “mickey mouse” (sound effects for every animated bounce and twitch) or a sweeping epic—audiences follow musical cues to smirk, chuckle, tear-up, or white-knuckle the armrest. At VeggieTales, from every sound effect to the rousing score performed by the 81-member Prague Symphony, from every character’s theme to every subtle reference or piece of whimsy . . . behind every silly song . . . music master Kurt Heinecke is there collaborating with Phil Vischer and Mike Nawrocki on silly songs, adding percussion, you name it to sweep sound together in a seamless production and performance.

Averaging the creative speed of one minute of music a day, Kurt first produced the Pirates score on his studio synthesizer. In the next stage, he added live percussion, brass and woodwinds (most of it crowding him for his office space). The actual movie replaces Kurt’s original run-through with the Prague Symphony’s 81-piece orchestra. And the result is 80-plus minutes of sweeping cinematic score surging through theaters.

“It’s fun writing all the rhythms and styles that seem to say pirates,” Kurt said. “You hear jigs or 6/8 rhythm, Irish music with whistles or accordion give you a lighter feel . . . then the big feel of ships and battle.”

It takes a special person to render lofty musical scores for tomatoes and cucumbers. For Kurt, the process started with directing a German Band in high school (polkas and lederhosen mandatory) and thinking outside the schottische from there.

Kurt graduated with a BA in choral and band directing from Luther College in Decorah IA where he also studied composition and electronic music. From there he taught children's music in the Bahamas, directed school bands in Chicago, and toured professionally. He was semi-settled into a church music-staff gig when he met the future Bob the Tomato, Larry the Cucumber, and Phil's wife, Lisa, *a.k.a.* Jr. Asparagus.

From Big Idea's inception, Kurt has overseen and contributed to the quirky and infectious rhythm and tunes of VeggieTales and *3-2-1 Penguins* films and videos. Scoring, song-writing, producing, collaborating with crazy cohorts . . . if it's a sound effect or tune, it moves to the beat of Kurt Heinecke.

Kurt lives in Franklin TN home his wife, Judy, and their three children.

CHUCK VOLLMER (production designer) is a former Disney artist. He worked closely with Director Mike Nawrocki and Producer Paula Marcus securing the movie's look, feel, and details. Each character's appearance, in fact, every location, color, and visual bears Chuck's masterful fingerprints and ingenuity.

Chuck's secret is painstaking preparation, which begins early and alongside Mike Nawrocki with a slow, deliberate walk through the script. "How do you sense this environment? More green? More blue? What time of day? How foggy? What mood are you looking for?"

With full and detailed information, Chuck, a painter, created the gorgeous scenes that set movie's entire tone and mood. His passion for precision took him to pirate forts, maps, and history for the right touch of animated authenticity. From that intense research, he created the ***Pirates*** bible, the frame-by-frame color key and look that determines every character, every color, all light, every scene, every texture, and how it all comes together.

Chuck's background artistry at Disney includes *Mulan*, *Pocahontas*, *The Lion King*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. At VeggieTales, his work includes *Minnesota Cuke and the Search for Samson's Hairbrush* (concept artist), *Jonah* (concept artist and visual development), and *Lord of the Beans*, in which he also was a voice.

Chuck is the father of five kids!

PAULA MARCUS (producer) owns the miracle worker category. Say you're staging a large event for 100-500 people: planning and managing professionals and vendors, schedules, talent, ideas as they happen, variables, surprises, and an intractable deadline. Now imagine pulling off 20 events a day, *on or under budget*—for two years. You're starting to get Paula's job description, and the miracle.

Backed by more than 30 years of live action movies—moving from Director's Guild trainee through assistant director, production manager, executive in charge of production, to producer—Paula masterminds the people and systems that turn Big Idea's big ideas into feature length films.

"Ironically, it's her perimeters and timetables that free us to be creative," Director Mike Nawrocki says. Nawrocki and Marcus headed the creative team, for 12 months at Starz Productions in Canada alone, that turned storyboard sketches into animated, humorous, colorful, well-lighted, textured, and musically orchestrated life.

"A producer's closest relationship on a film is with the director whose vision she's helping bring to life," Paula says. "If the director is someone you click with and with whom you have mutual respect—that makes the process fun no matter how challenging it gets."

As of this writing, only Marcus and Nawrocki have seen the entire and final movie version, and she's beside herself regarding the total effect. "The way the final score, color, sound effects, and musical numbers come together is absolutely thrilling," she says. "VeggieTales has never looked or sounded better."

She adds: "You're dealing with talking vegetables. How could you not have a good day?"

TERRY PEFANIS (chief operating officer) joined Big Idea in 2003, he was delighted to pick up on a product-in-progress appealing to almost every age consumer. Terry was also big on the movie.

As chief operating officer of Big Idea, Terry heads all production and product marketing both nationally and abroad. He oversees music, book publishing, business

affairs, and accounting. And he opens doors to develop VeggieTales in both the general and Christian markets.

“When we put a product in the market it’s going to be biblically rooted,” Terry says, “Even simple things we provide the churches like coloring sheets for preschoolers—everything we do has entertainment and a lesson. And regardless of the medium, the idea is to engage parents and children in conversations about the story’s lesson.”

Terry goes on, “The messages in our stories are presented in a contemporary way. Phil and Mike are quirky Monty Python fans with odd humor that shows up in the storylines and rewrites. It’s fun and it takes some liberties but it’s true to the message.”

Terry joined Big Idea in 2003 after more than 12 years in finance with Price Waterhouse Coopers and 10 years in key positions at Gaylord Films and Gaylord Entertainment—most recently as COO.

At Gaylord, Terry helped spearhead a \$400 million joint venture with Warner Bros. Studios. He oversaw finance, production, and release of six successful feature films such as *A Walk to Remember*. His chief financial duties also covered several fully owned entertainment companies serving the Christian market, including Word Entertainment, distributor for Big Idea’s VeggieTales franchise.

Terry lives in Nashville with his wife and three children.