



SPORTS: Fredonia downs Dunkirk in high school tennis/ **PAGE B1**

OBSERVER

Ex-Fredonia man finds success in filmmaking

By **NICHOLAS L. DEAN**
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Making movies wasn't a career former Fredonia resident

John Schwert thought he'd ever commit to, but following the success of a self-made feature-length film he has parlayed his newfound love into a full-time job.

"I actually studied visual mediums in the form of marketing and advertising. I really thought that writing, shooting and directing advertisements was going to be my forte," Schwert explained. "I think I'm still pretty good at it,

but I really like shooting the feature narratives. I really like writing a full-length screenplay, shooting a full-length screen play and directing it."



John Schwert directs actors on the set of his feature-length film "Among Brothers."

when he quit to make his film "Among Brothers."

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Based on actual events, "Among Brothers" explores the Nov. 9, 1994, death of Jennifer Matthews. A senior at Bergen State University in South Carolina, she was found in her burned down apartment, but police discovered there was no smoke in her lungs meaning she died before the fire. Her brother, Tom Mogan, dedicated 10 years of his life to putting the pieces of the unsolved murder together into story form, which served as the basis for Schwert's film.

"I read the story by the brother and it was written in a manuscript sort of context so I took that and wrote it into an adapted screenplay so we could shoot it," Schwert said. "I wish I had some war stories to tell, but aside from trying to shoot it on a 200 budget everything went well. It was my first feature and we shot it in 24 of 26 days last September. We shot it for \$2,000 of my own money and that was a tough gig, and I guess that's sort of a war story in itself."

With a crew of 12 to 14 people, Schwert was able to shoot the film in four weeks. Recruiting local theater actors as well as professionals out of New York and Los Angeles, Schwert said everyone was willing to be paid a small stipend and most of his cost went to locations, insurance and other such requirements.

Forming his own production company, Fourth Ward Productions, Inc., Schwert has been seeking distribution for the film while continuing to tour the 2005-06 international film festival circuit.

Showing in nearby Erie, Pa., Saturday afternoon, "Among Brothers" will be screened at the 2005 Great Lakes Film Festival in the Roanoke Theatre For Contemporary Art. A non-profit organization, The Great Lakes Film Association kicked off its four-day festival Thursday night and it will continue today and throughout the weekend. The festival features special guests such as Andy Dick as well as other filmmakers and actors.

"Among Brothers" will be shown in the main screening room at 2:30 p.m.

"I've gotten a couple of offers on the film, but we're waiting. I'm waiting to see if we get into any festivals later this year like Sundance or "Slamdance," Schwert said. "I don't want nor do I think it's worth millions of dollars, but I think if we did a limited release at art houses in cities and second theaters, I think we could do pretty well and pull in a couple of million at the box office."

After a limited release, Schwert said he would like to see the film go to DVD and eventually cable channels like HBO and Showtime. For now he's continuing to show the film on the festival circuit when he's not busy at work. Schwert had planned to come up for the Great Lakes Film

Film showing in Erie

- **Who** — Former Fredonia resident
- **What** — Showing feature-length film
- **When** — Saturday, 2:30 p.m.
- **Where** — Erie, Pa.
- **Why** — John Schwert is living and working as a full-time filmmaker in North Carolina and on Saturday his first full-length movie "Among Brothers" will show in Erie, Pa.

Festival, but is being flown to Alabama to scout locations for the movie he's now working on — a NASCAR comedy starring Will Ferrell.

"I'm in the location department so I'm actually responsible for some things like location scouting, managing locations, managing security and it still has a nice creative element to it. We get to read the script and go out and find locations," Schwert said. "It's a lot of the similar functions I had to do on a small film, but when you're doing a small film you're doing everything from line producing to production management. With this, it's so specific. I'm just responsible for locations."

The movie, "High, Wide and Handsome" will be in theaters next summer and Schwert promises it will be a huge, comedic blockbuster. Because Columbia Pictures and Sony Corp. are shooting on-site in North Carolina, the companies recruited Schwert and a small handful of other local filmmakers to work on the movie.

"I'd have to attribute some of this to Among Brothers," Schwert said. "There's only four of us locally and one was my assistant director for Among Brothers."

Now his full-time passion and profession, Schwert said he is enjoying the Columbia Pictures gig. However, he is looking forward to shooting another movie of his own.

"It's like we're handling someone else's baby," Schwert said. "I've got another film that I'm hoping to shoot in May. It's kind of a comedy like Office Space and Swingers... Hopefully we can get that into Sundance next year."

In August, "Among Brothers" added five more film festivals to its 2005 schedule. The film has been taken to and is showing at the Bluegrass Independent Film Festival, the Kansas International Film Festival and the Big Bear Lake Festival in September; as well as the California Independent Film Festival and the LA Westwood Festival in October. For more information about Schwert or his films, visit 4wproductions.com.

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