The Charlotte Observer - charlotteobserver.com

## Meet Charlotte's award-winning documentary team

NEIGHBORHOODS MICHAEL J. SOLENDER



Determination, perstrong technical knowledge are cornerstone components in successful ca-

Add a love for storytelling that entertains and educates, and you'll find the pedigree of two Charlotte women who are quietly becoming standouts in the highly competitive field of documentary filmmaking.

Beverly Penninger and Alyson Young are the dynamic force behind Naka Productions, a Charlotte video production company that has numerous independent films to its credit, including an Emmy award-winning historical documentary.

"The Spirit of Sacajawea" is a remarkable film that tells the story of the only woman and the only Indian to accompany Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery to the Pacific coast and back.

The film, released in 2007 and shown locally on WTVI, will launch nationally on PBS this fall, to coincide. with a tribute to Native American heritage undertaken by the network.

Penninger, a Queen City native, and



MICHAEL J. SOLENDER PHOTO

Alyson Young, left, and Beverly Penninger of Naka Productions.

Young came to independent filmmaking from their own successful careers in broadcast media.

Penninger's background includes a degree in radio, TV and theater from UNC Chapel Hill and lengthy stints writing, editing and producing local and regional television programs for media and sports outlets.

NASCAR fans may recognize her name as the executive producer of one of the sport's top-selling home videos, "Richard Petty: The Legend."

of Charlotte-based Carolina School of Broadcasting, a trade school that offers an accredited program in broadcast communications technology. She

has a public relations and media relations tensive filming, writing and editing. tions background, and extensive ex- According to Penninger, it is not unperience in sports marketing and television production.

Since the inception of Naka, the women have teamed up to produce films with significant North Carolina connections. "Wild in Corolla," narrated by Charles Kuralt, documents the controversy surrounding the wild horses that for nearly five centuries have roamed the tiny Outer Banks town of Corolla.

"Moving America's Lighthouse" features Walter Cronkite and original music by Charlotte pianist, teacher and composer Loonis McGlohon. The film documents the effort to move the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse to higher ground.

Young told me recently that a common thread running through their films is an educational component. "We want people to be entertained of course, but also to learn things, feel uplifted and take notice in what they have come to learn," said Young.

"We are following our passion," said Penninger. "As independent filmmakers, we are free to pursue the sto-Young is a co-owner and operator ries we want to tell and depict them in the manner in which we feel best represents their essence."

> More often than not, that means considerable research, interviews, ex

usual for a project to take several years to make.

One such project, which is more than 10 years in the making, is perhaps their most ambitious and captivating film to date. "Fifty Years of Folk: The History of the Newport Folk Festival," like all Penninger and Young films, is a labor of love.

This film captures their enthusiasm and joy for music, specifically folk music, making it particularly special for the filmmaking duo.

"Music is a powerful tool for change, healing and reflection of the times we live in," said Penninger, "There is no other event in the history of contemporary American folk music that has come to embody this notion the way that Newport has."

Penninger and Young, with the assistance and blessing of the event's producers and management, George Wein and Bob Jones, have interviewed a who's who of American folk music, including Joan Baez, Odetta, Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie, Judy Collins, Doc Watson, Peter Yarrow and many others.

The pair has exclusive concert footage, including the 50th anniversary program from last year's festival, and additional rare and unique footage of

these and many other artists.

"This story has not been told in its entirety," said Young "Far from being an old and tired dusty relic, the Newport Folk Festival has always gone to great lengths to feature new and upcoming artists alongside established performers."

"More new world music and young artists are stepping in right next to traditional folk singers. People will see in our film that folk music cannot be stereotyped, today's musicians such as the Indigo Girls have built upon roots and tradition from blues musicians such as Lead Belly and Odetta but bring their own unique style and signature to the stage."

Penninger and Young are in conversations with PBS regarding a multi-part series, and are also looking for sponsors to partner with. The project is slated for release in time for next year's festival in August.

A preview is available for viewing at their web site, www.nakatv.com/ SampleMovie.asp?v=BALD)

Charlotte will be seeing more from these talented women in the months ahead.

t foot- Michael J. Solender is a local freelance writer. He writes about Charlotte neighborhoods. You can reach him here:

michaeljsolender@gmail.com