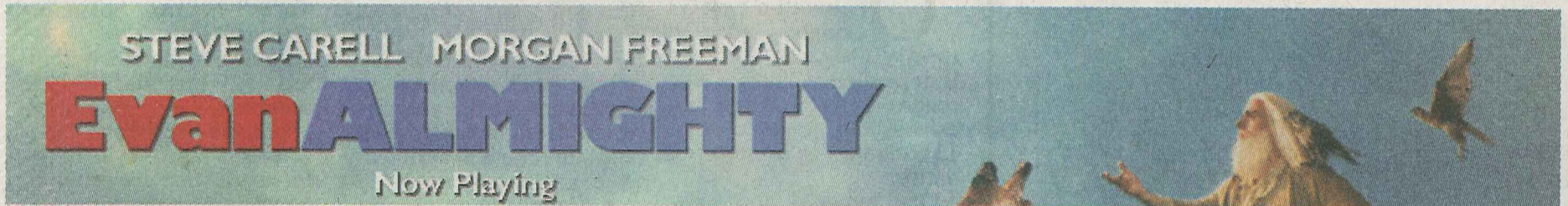


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King & Queen man makes movie debut

By **ROBIN LAWSON**
Editor

When directors needed a crane operator for their 2007 comedy "Evan Almighty," George Pennington was the man for the job.

The 26-year-old King and Queen County resident made his movie debut with the Friday opening of "Evan," a spinoff from the 2003 hit comedy "Bruce Almighty." At \$175 million, it's the most expensive comedy ever produced in Hollywood and opened at number one this weekend, reeling in \$32.1 million.

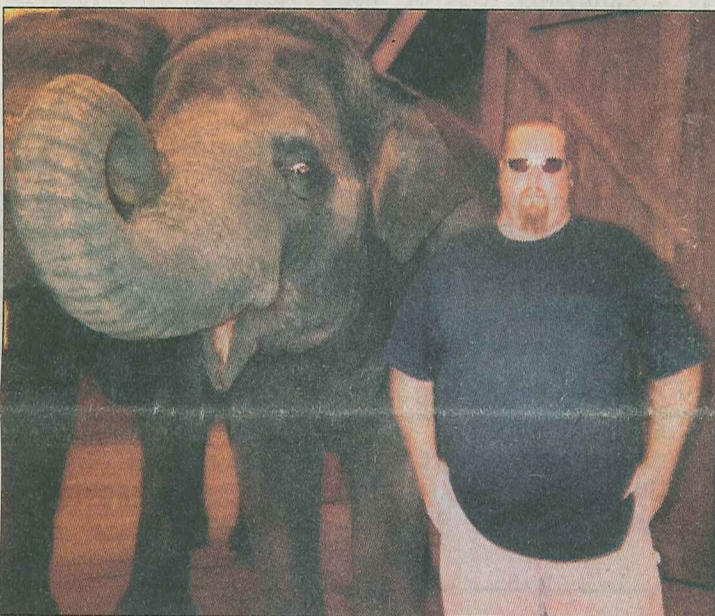
The film, featuring actor Steve Carell, is directed by Tom Shadyac, a 1981 graduate of the University of Virginia. Scenes for the film were shot last summer in various locations in Virginia, including areas in and around Crozet, Waynesboro, Richmond, and Staunton. Other filming took place at Universal Studios in Hollywood.

Evan Baxter, played by Carell, is a Virginia congressman who God (Morgan Freeman) commands to build an ark because a flood is coming. His family is befuddled, animals start following him to Congress and he's eventually suspended from work. But his ark building gets international attention.

Pennington spent six weeks filming in Crozet, a small Albemarle County town west of Charlottesville, where he is portrayed as a mean crane operator sent to tear down the ark. The ark was designed to meet the actual measurements of the biblical ark, measuring 450 feet long, 80 feet wide, and 51 feet high.

"In the movie I give it all I've got to knock it down, but then it starts raining," he said.

Pennington operates a 200-ton German Demag crane for W.O. Grubb in Richmond, one of the largest family owned and operated crane rental companies in the nation. Directors wanted his crane for the movie, but Pennington was unable to show the



Above: A W.O. Grubb crane on the set of Evan Almighty in Crozet, where the ark was built. Left: George Pennington with an elephant at Universal Studios in Hollywood where interior scenes were shot. Photos courtesy Joe Bullock.

previously hired actor how to operate the crane, so they used him instead.

"The director asked me if I knew how to act and I said I could try," he recalled. "I did well enough to make the cut."

In addition to his time in Crozet, Pennington was also flown to

Hollywood for two weeks to shoot the interior scenes. "When the flood comes in I have to run into the ark [along with a lot of animals and other people]," he explained. "Overall, you see me a lot in the movie."

That surprised Pennington too since many actors and extras get nixed in the

final cut. He was filmed for nearly 50 hours and is seen in the movie about a minute total.

And, he'd do it all over if he could.

"Absolutely, I would do it again. I really enjoyed going to Hollywood and Universal Studios and seeing the different sets, and how everything is put into place," he said. "I've never been to California, much less Hollywood, and I got to meet Steve Carell, John Goodman, Lauren Graham, and Wanda Sykes. They're all really nice."

Pennington was also impressed with how well the movie turned out, and the message it portrayed. God tells Evan that the way to change the world is by doing Acts of Random Kindness ("ARK") one at a time.

"They did a good job of getting that message across," he said. "It's a good movie. It's funny."

Pennington, who has two children — five-year-old Leah and four-year-old Zachary — with wife Tanya, watched it for the first time with a large group of family and friends Friday night in Williamsburg and then again on Sunday in Charlottesville with the Virginia Cast and Crew.

At Regal Cinemas in Williamsburg he shocked moviegoers when stood up after appearing on screen and asked, "Did you see me?"

"That was funny," he recalled, laughing at how the audience members started whispering to one another and asking, "Was that really him?"

It must have been obvious as several people asked Pennington to sign autographs at the end of the movie.

Even though the opening weekend tally for "Evan" was the lowest for a number one opening this summer, Pennington said he thinks people are enjoying the movie.

"It's definitely a family film. The only thing my little boy didn't like was that my crane got washed away in the flood. He didn't understand at first that it wasn't real. But I explained it was just in the movie and then he was okay," Pennington said. ■

Evan Almighty is rated PG.

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