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Liberty student uses talent to capture campus experiences on camera

December 01, 2008 | Carmen P. Fleischauer

The motto of YouTube.com is “Broadcast Yourself,” and that’s exactly what Devin Olson has done. If you search his username, BlastCoaster87, you will find close to 100 videos. Olson’s videos depict what he is passionate about — most often Liberty University and amusement parks.

“My hobby is roller coasters, theme parks and anything related. My username on YouTube is BlastCoaster87 because my favorite roller coaster for years was Volcano: the Blast Coaster at Kings Dominion near Richmond [Va.], and my birth year is 1987,” Olson said.

Olson said he was first introduced to YouTube in high school. He knew that he wanted to come to Liberty University and began searching for anything related to the school. However, the site was just starting to take off, and he was disappointed to find only a couple of videos about specific clubs or events but nothing to show what campus life was truly like from a student perspective.

Although he never had an inclination toward filming or editing, it was around this same time that Olson felt called by God to venture into the media world.

“One day I was taking pictures on a digital camera and just happened to switch it over to the video mode just for fun,” Olson said. “I fell in love with it, and anything I fall in love with as a hobby I always seem to take to the next level in some way.”

As a freshman at Liberty, Olson carried his camera wherever he went. He was able to take it out at a moment’s notice and capture footage of campus happenings. With an editing tool on his computer, he produced five- to six-minute videos each month. Uploaded to YouTube, the videos were set to music that Olson thought would fit the tone of the video.

Commenting about the popularity of his videos, Olson said, “I never expected that they’d get viewed around 20,000 times my freshman year and 110,000 times total within the first couple years. Apparently I wasn’t the only prospective student searching YouTube for ‘Liberty University.’”

Olson is now a junior at Liberty and has become quite recognized for his video skills, both on-campus and in other venues. In addition to the LU videos he places on YouTube, he works for University Advancement, capturing promotional video material for the school. Chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. has even asked him to create videos for campus events.

One video requested by the chancellor was a compilation of highlights from the spring 2008 semester. The video shows many aspects of campus life and interviews Chancellor Falwell and his wife, Becki. The closing scene, shot in the LaHaye Student Union, shows Falwell Jr. and a few graduates in full regalia running on treadmills. The 10-minute video was shown in the final convocation of the semester.

Olson also runs a website based on his roller coaster hobby and produces DVDs and books for amusement parks. He interned with Steve Saint, son of the late missionary Nate Saint, this past summer and made videos for his missions-support organization in Florida. A public service announcement video he completed for a class is now airing on cable TV in the Lynchburg, Va., area.

When asked why he chose to attend Liberty, Olson said, “I became familiar with Liberty back when my sister was considering it and then when she came here a few years back. I really fell in love with the campus and its environment. It feels like a tight-knit family of 11,000 to me, if that’s possible.

“But even more than that, I fell in love with the focus of the campus’ energy toward living for Christ and serving our world in all arenas. Liberty was my first and last choice for college; I never applied anywhere else.”

Olson’s future goals include seeing the media transformed for the better.

“However sizeable my role in that will be is really all up to God, but my specific calling is really to do everything I can to affect lives through mass media.”