

The Emmy goes to ...

NBC12 marketing producer Justin Lenart ('04) and his colleagues were recently honored for their *Snow Day* spot at the 57th Annual Emmy Awards Show in Washington, D.C. Lenart, a JMU media arts and design major, has worked in TV news production in Richmond, Virginia, and as a producer with *America's Most Wanted*. In this interview with *Madison*, Lenart discusses *Snow Day* and how JMU helped launch his career.

Tell us about your Emmy award.

The Emmy is a great honor and one our marketing team never expected when we initially made the *Snow Day* spot. It feels great to be recognized by your peers and to be included in this prestigious club. The award itself is a bright, shiny reminder of how hard work really does pay off.

Describe the concept of *Snow Day*.

NBC12 Marketing Director Brandon Seier proposed his idea for the promo, and we all jumped on board. We simply set out to make a fun and memorable spot that promotes the NBC12 brand while entertaining the people of Richmond. When schools are closed, people need a media outlet to turn to for that information. If the roads are bad and schools are shuttered, most folks aren't going anywhere ... so fun can, and will, be had. We wanted to capture that joy!

Can you tell us about the production process?

Once we had our concept locked down, we held a Face-

book casting call and got an overwhelming number of responses within a few hours. After narrowing down the list of families we'd like to include, we set up shoots at each of their homes. Victor Nash, Tina Rodriguez Thomas and myself took turns filming and directing the kids. After everything was shot, Tina and I took turns editing.

Some in our department were worried that the music track was too bombastic, but I took the stance that the spot lives and dies by the music it's cut to — and this spot needed some epic, in-your-face music in order for it to be memorable. Ultimately, they sided with my musical choice.

How did your Madison Experience influence your career choices and opportunities?

I always wanted to combine my SMAD degree with my passion for criminal justice. Within a few years after graduation, I was lucky enough to land a junior-level producer position with *America's Most Wanted* — a job I found on Craigslist of all things! I was insanely excited, as it

afforded me the opportunity to put my production and writing skills to use while incorporating my major and minor (sociology). Over time, I moved up the ranks and produced countless on-air segments, while helping provide justice for crime victims and their families. The show was ultimately canceled, so after freelancing for a while, I moved back to my hometown of Richmond, this time as a marketing producer with NBC12. One of the first big promos I worked on here was *Snow Day*.


Do you have any advice for undergraduates who would love to pursue a similar career?

The joke in the industry is to tell anyone interested in joining it to run. But that's not true at all. It's a gratifying industry to be a part of; and so long as you have a can-do attitude, you can, and will, go far. The TV/film industry is really a small one, and the business is truly all about who you know. You'd be surprised how often opportunities arise or disappear simply because people remember the quality of your work ethic.

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Watch the video at bit.ly/1RTgOBG



Lenart says, "Day in and day out, our team loves doing what we do. We each have a unique sense of humor that we try and inject into our spots, when possible." Their *Snow Day* spot garnered an Emmy.