

alumni ACHIEVEMENTS

MAKING THE NEWS

By JOHN KENYON

Most people do not remember the exact date when they chose their career path, but **Leighton Grant '03** does – Sept 11, 2001. “Watching the coverage of 9/11 made me decide I wanted to go into news,” said Grant. “It made me realize how powerful news could be.”

Grant has proven to be a powerful news photographer in his short career. This year alone, he received two regional Emmy Awards and three Associated Press Awards for his work with WLOS News 13, the ABC affiliate in Asheville.



Leighton Grant '03 accepts an Emmy Award.

He won a “Best Feature” Emmy for the package “Magic Man,” a story about Ricky Boone, a magician in Weaverville who was born with a rare bone disease and has been in a wheelchair his whole life. Boone owns a magic store and is an inspiration to others through his shows and uplifting attitude, said Grant. The second Emmy was for his coverage of the funeral of Mitch Carver, a U.S. Army pilot killed when his reconnaissance helicopter crashed near Mosul, Iraq.

Collecting a pair of regional Emmy Awards in a single year would be a lifetime achievement for most news photographers, but Grant also claimed three Associated Press awards – “Best Photography in North Carolina,” “Best Feature” and “Honorable Mention Spot News.”

Although Grant didn’t decide to pursue a career in news until the Sept. 11 tragedies, he always knew he was going into the video business. “While still a student, Leighton purchased a professional-grade camera and video-editing software and was working freelance, shooting sports footage and selling it to television stations,” said Donald Connelly, acting head of the department of communication. “He had style and professionalism you don’t often find in a student.”

Grant remembers working in the field on a video project at Western as a pivotal experience toward his career. “You got to use the equipment and get out there with the burden of having a project with a deadline,” he said. “If you have the self-motivation and drive to tell a story, WCU has the resources to visually capture stories. Students are using the same equipment that is industry-standard for local news.”

His professors say they saw his talent early on. “I knew Leighton was going to be successful because he had an incredible thirst for knowledge and wanted to be involved in everything,” said Connelly. Pdraig Acheson, director of studio operations for WCU’s department of communication, agreed. “I clearly recall his desire to learn and excel, and was impressed with his self-taught ability to shoot and edit video,” Acheson said.

“Shortly after college, he landed a position with WBTV, the CBS affiliate in Charlotte, an incredibly good start for a beginner. In a very short time, he has become a principle photographer and satellite news-gathering truck operator for WLOS with numerous awards under his belt,” said Acheson.

That’s a wrap on a pretty good year for Leighton Grant.