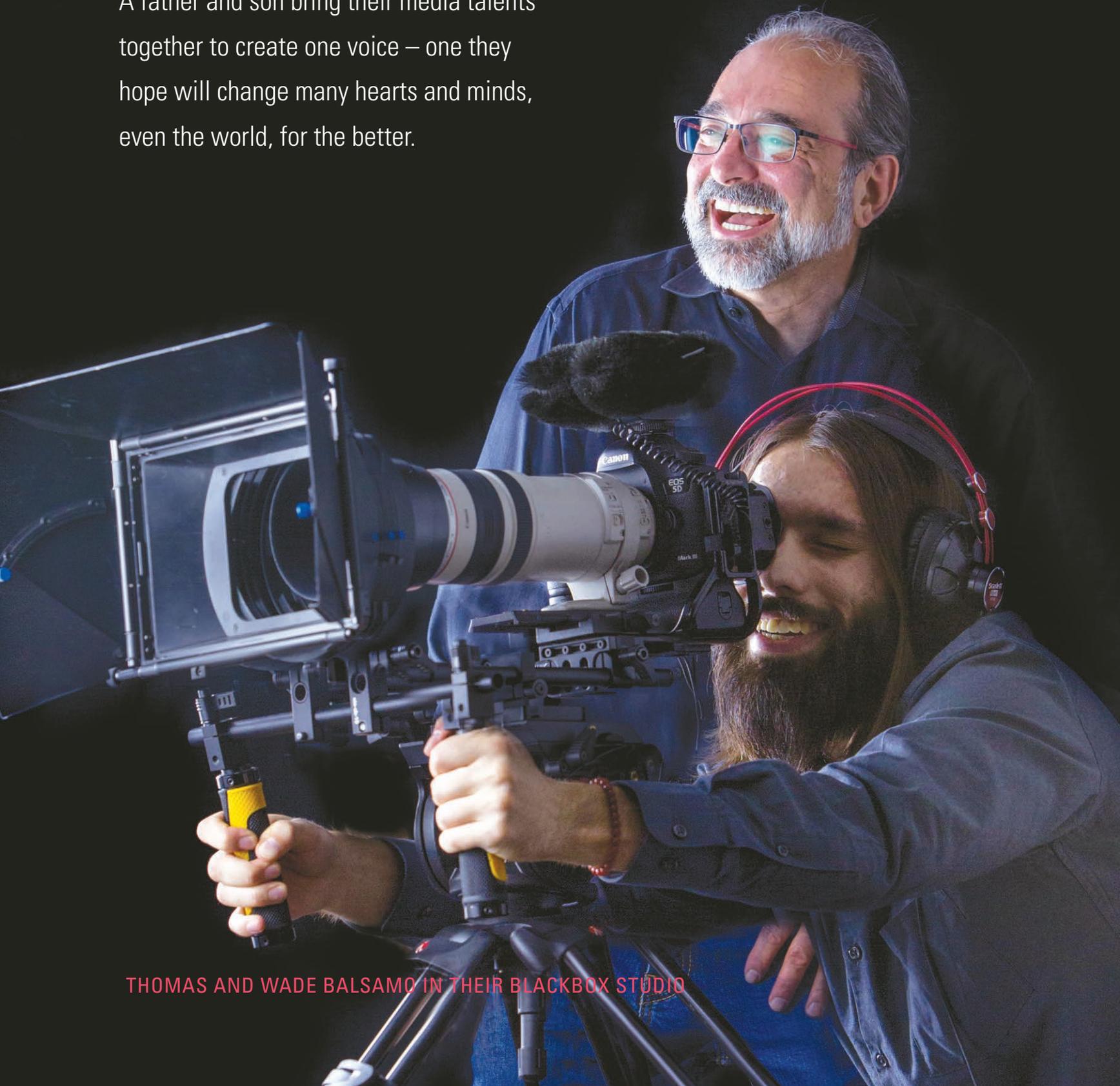


ONE TO MANY

A father and son bring their media talents together to create one voice – one they hope will change many hearts and minds, even the world, for the better.



THOMAS AND WADE BALSAMO IN THEIR BLACKBOX STUDIO



Standing in front of the “i have a voice” gallery are (from left) Paolo Cascio, Nicole Nehf, Helga Richter, Wade Balsamo, and Thomas Balsamo.

LONG-TIME BARRINGTON PORTRAIT ARTIST and now filmmaker Thomas Balsamo took his first family portrait commission in 1978. He was 18. Throughout his 20s, Thomas worked to develop his well-known portrait style that can be seen in homes, businesses, and every issue of this magazine, with its Quintessential People feature. After years of making portraits cherished by so many, Thomas noticed a trend that took his work and outlook to a new level.

“The philanthropic aspect for me kicked into high gear in 1999, as I felt much gratitude for success as a portrait artist,” Thomas said. “My clients started coming from other states and countries. Realizing how much power images have to evoke the emotions of the viewer, I realized with much power comes much responsibility. Since my work is touching people so deeply, I wanted to use that ability to create work with important messages in compelling images that get people’s attention.”

His first film was a 5-minute short with the message of his book, “Souls Beneath and Beyond Autism”, published by McGraw Hill. The film was simple, using only his still images from the book and Sharon Rosenbloom’s writing. “We were so fortunate to get permission to use the song, “I Could Not Ask for More” as sung by Sara Evans.

The short film was shown at the Autism Society of America National Convention in Pittsburg. As the film was showed on three large screens,

Thomas watched as most of the audience was wiping away their tears. “Another epiphany—the screening of our first film at the Autism Society of America national convention was a profound experience. Watching 1,000 people wiping tears from their eyes had me realize if I wanted to touch the masses, film was where I had to go.”

Wade, one of his three sons, was a freshman at BHS when the two did their first film together. It was for Walk On Farm Therapeutic Riding Center in Barrington.

“I’ve been making documentaries with my dad since I was a techie-kid who was good with cameras and could figure out how to edit,” Wade said. “It’s always been a passion to create the art of moving pictures and film. Somehow in the back of my mind, I always knew this is what I would be doing. But figuring out what to do with it took an ‘aha’ moment or two.”

A SON SHINES

“Through the years, I have worked with countless talented and dedicated people on various projects, and Wade is among the most talented and dedicated,” Thomas says proudly of his son. “He is led by his heart. He shines in the editing room. When he is editing, he’s 100 percent there for days—like Michelangelo when he painted the Sistine Chapel. I’m so blessed to work with Wade for who he is. Being my son is a great bonus.”



The 2017 GiGi's Playhouse Gala film team are (in front, from left) Thomas Balsamo, Nancy Gianni, and Paolo Cascio. In back, from left: Wade Balsamo, Michael Balsamo, Helga Richter, Rick Howard, and Shannon Kerin-Powell.

Wade and Thomas are in alignment in many ways, and their lens is “living our life purpose and using our passions and talents to improve the human condition.”

“We collaborate in many areas well, when we are on the set shooting something we have pre-visualized for a month and it comes out exactly as we saw it in our mind’s eye is an amazing experience, and the joy is shared with our whole team,” Thomas said.

LARGER THAN LIFE

Wade and his dad have a unique relationship that centers around a shared passion for what they do. “In a sense, we’re obsessed with the creative process: we’re always brainstorming. Day and night there is a continuous dreaming of new ideas for more than a dozen different films, causes, projects, and campaigns in which we can push for a more compassionate world,” Wade says.

The father-son team has a secret ingredient driving their success. Wade explains their approach. “I think one thing that’s melded a creative synergy in our team is the knowing that what we do is so much bigger than us. The stories leave emotional impressions that can resonate ... and there’s the butterfly effect in which one triggers a chain reaction of good. So, in that perspective, there’s no ego between us, there’s little sense of ‘ownership of ideas’ and we can focus on the impact we’re striving to create and do what’s best for that.”

PICTURING THE FUTURE

For the Balsamos, it became a matter of turning this passion into a viable full-time career; which meant not just making films and documentaries, but getting their media products in front of people so that their clients and non-profit partners could reap the maximum benefits, and the messages would be heard. A chance meeting would open that door and a lasting partnership with GiGi's Playhouse.

“I met Nancy [Gianni] in Hoffman Estates, by coincidence, after several people suggested to each of us that we should meet,” Thomas said. “This was shortly after she had founded GiGi’s, and I guess fate brought us together because we were able to put a face to their campaign that helped people see past the Down syndrome diagnosis. This became the “i have a voice” traveling gallery show—a 30’ wide by 8’ high display of large portraits of individuals with Down syndrome. “i have a voice” traveled across the country, spreading the message of acceptance for individuals with disabilities.”

This early project was a catalyst for all involved. “I’m so proud of my work with GiGi’s for over 11 years. It has been a great privilege being a part of the GiGi’s Playhouse family working on countless projects with Nancy, GiGi, and the whole Playhouse Family,” Thomas said.

STORY POWER

This year, World Touch Productions, the business formalized by Thomas and Wade, was given the challenge to create a short documentary for GiGi's 2017

gala fundraiser. “We wanted to make something classic that would bring into focus the lives that that group has changed and their need for funding,” Wade said. “We flew Paolo Cascio in from California to produce a four-camera interview. We captured eight stories into a one-voice message that told the perennial ‘GiGi’s Playhouse’ story, starting with the struggle of the diagnosis, through the weight that GiGi’s lifts off of parent’s shoulders, and the triumph of hope that GiGi’s brings and needs to continue to bring with the help of their donors.”

The film was shown at 31 national and international galas, and at the Hoffman Playhouse’s Gala alone, it was said that the donations received during “the ask” that followed the screening were so far beyond projections, it could have returned their investment nine-fold on that night alone.

“I feel like the GiGi’s film really established our brand of one-voice message documentaries, which tell a more universal story through many experiences interwoven and overlapped as one journey,” Wade said. “My dad’s book, “Souls Beneath and Beyond Autism” was a universal one-voice message, and I like how that influence has grown over the years.”

WADE’S WORLD

Wade does many things while taking each project from the concept of a message to the response of the end-viewer. He’s a director/producer, camera operator, editor, and digital marketing strategist.

His favorite part? “It’s in the editing,” he said. “That’s where the story really starts to take shape, as bits of information are interwoven into a journey that pulls the viewer along to an empathetic realization. Most people don’t realize how much of a hand the editor has in a film, especially a documentary; as many hours of footage is trimmed and reduced into minutes of the emotional heights.”

This father and son team is dedicated to the content they create, and following through with the distribution of their films has the two growing into a creative agency with video marketing strategies. “I enjoy the sense of engineering a video that people are most likely to share, and the extensive test-marketing and optimization, which is more efficient without passing the baton from the editor,” he said.

Thomas looks back with a sense of pride and accomplishment, now that his work takes him to larger audiences. “The gift from all of the years working for the community are the many amazing relationships I have made with many incredible people. Being on the BADC and now the Cultural Commission is something I am so proud of, while serving with genuine people who want to make a positive impact.”

TAKING FLIGHT

Wade never thought he’d be interested in marketing, but working with many organizations who did not know how to use the videos they made online

The World Touch and GiGi’s Playhouse team wrap up their promo shoot for launching Generation G. From left: Paolo Cascio, Bella Gianni, Nancy Gianni, GiGi Gianni, Thomas Balsamo, Nicole Nehf, Helga Richter, Ethan Hoegler, and Wade Balsamo.





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set him down a path to learn digital marketing, and find a way to use video content to help people find an organization that could help them.

“So, I got into creating Facebook video campaigns as a way to reach more people for our clients with the messages that count,” he said. “I specialized in that niche and proved our model with a few profitable commercial projects before moving into the intrinsic realm of creating human value, with one of the most rewarding marketing campaigns we could do.”

Another alliance came together, this time between World Touch and WINGS, an agency that serves women and children who are victims of domestic violence. They created a PSA commercial for WINGS with an empowering story of a woman and her child leaving home to go to a domestic violence shelter. “We were able to harness the medium of Facebook with this video to offer a domestic violence hotline, and give hope in reminding people that there’s a way out of an abusive situation. If it reached even one

Still frames from the WINGS PSA tell a powerful story. This film, titled “There Is a Way Out”, won a local award.

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woman who needed to see that hotline or hear the message, then it’s invaluable” Wade said. The short film earned third place at the May 2017 Catlow Theater Barrington Area Film Festival.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Their passion is cause-marketing with stories from the heart, say the two men speaking with one voice. “Because the power of a story can instill hope and empathy, create genuine heartfelt connections and impassion viewers to get involved, nurturing a better world, together,” Thomas said. “World Touch is building relationships with donors and nonprofit partners, executive producers who would like to invest in creating films and media to improve the human condition. World Touch Productions is more than just a film production company. They’ve become a creative agency for cause-marketing video campaigns, hoping to change the world by creating media that inspires individuals to step up and make a difference; champions of acceptance and compassion for all beings. We believe that the right story, reaching the right person at just the right moment can change a life.”

Telling stories from the inner walls—the sensitive topics that take down



Left: Wade Balsamo, Sally Roeckell, Thomas Balsamo, and Paolo Cascio got the shot they needed for the WINGS film



the walls between us and help us feel the empathy for one another—takes a high level of energy and commitment.

To recharge his batteries, Thomas enjoys walking in nature, meditation, eating healthy, practicing yoga, and being in the moment. He leads the Barrington Meditation meetup. He adds that, “Working on passion projects for positive impact are very energizing and charge my batteries. It’s about following life’s purpose. I think when we follow our passion, we’re led to our life’s purpose.”

Wade enjoys the study of Eastern Philosophy, and is intrigued by the subtle metaphors used in Zen parables which convey deep wisdom with ease and simplicity, fit for a children’s bedtime story. “I think they’re some of the perfect archetypes for simple, profound storytelling,” Wade said. “I just finished reading Thich Nhat Hanh’s “Silence”, and it resonated with my whole creative process. It’s important to spend time in silence. My best ideas are heard there.”

To learn more about World Touch Productions, visit www.worldtouch-productions.com. Thomas Balsamo is still very active creating classic fine-art portraiture. Visit www.portraitsbythomas.com to learn more. 

Right: Wade and Thomas Balsamo on location for The Build Team, a local nonprofit that offers home repairs for those in need.

