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**FROM DOCUMENTARIES TO PLANNED HORROR FLICKS,
ONE LAWYER BALANCES PRACTICE AND PRODUCTION**

BY DUSTIN J. SIEBERT

As a consequence of being human, Rich Lenkov has to sleep. But sleep is certainly not at the top of his priority list.

Higher on that list is his production company, Chila Productions, which focuses on television, film and live events. The company's first major production was " '85: The Untold Story of the Greatest Team in Pro Football History," a feature-length documentary on the laudable 1985 Chicago Bears that aired on PBS last year.

"Chila" is a portmanteau of the two cities where the company's founders live.

"My partner Scott [Prestin] is originally from Chicago, but moved out to Los Angeles to direct and produce, so the title is our nod to the West Coast and Midwest," Lenkov said.

Also ahead of sleep on Lenkov's list is his co-ownership of After, a 4 a.m. nightclub in the River North neighborhood scheduled to open this summer.

Of course, there's also Lenkov's day job as a capital member of Bryce Downey Lenkov, where he focuses on entertainment law, insurance litigation and product liability, among other areas. He shares some of that legal expertise with the public as co-host of "Legal Face Off," a WGN radio show in which he, fellow Chicago attorney Jason Whiteside and their guests tackle pertinent legal issues.

"I stay pretty aware with what's going on in the legal world and I love expressing my opinion on what's going on, so being on the radio is a very good outlet for that," Lenkov said.

Though he has personally helped produce major stage productions including "Rock of Ages" and "The Rascals: Once Upon a Dream," Chila Productions is comparatively small, and Lenkov expects it to stay that way for the time being.

"We [principals] have production assistants, but we mostly function in a lower budget space and our productions are meant to be lean, independent films," he said. "We have a small staff, but I don't think you can tell by the product we put on the screen."

Lenkov talks to us about his production company and his tireless schedule.

CL: How did Chila Productions come into existence?

Lenkov: I started it about two years ago when I partnered with my law school classmate [from Northern Illinois University College of Law] Scott Prestin. I was interested in entertainment and pop culture before I ever thought of becoming a lawyer; I always loved the documentary space specifically, and that's why our first two projects were docs. We did the '85 Bears documentary and another sports documentary about the Expos ["The Perfect Storm: Story of the 1994 Montreal Expos"]. As I evolved my legal practice, I started taking on more entertainment law, so I was exposed to a lot of the industry from the legal side and it motivated me to take a stab at it from the production side.

CL: How do you manage Chila Productions with your day job?

Lenkov: Chicago has an incredibly vibrant production community, and so much of my production work happens right here, but I'm in Los Angeles and Las Vegas a lot. L.A., New York and Vegas is where much of the action is, but I can do a lot of this work from anywhere. My day job is very time-consuming — I have a lot of clients to serve — but I also don't sleep much. When you're passionate about the things you do, you find the time to do it.

CL: What made you tackle the 1985 Chicago Bears team for your first documentary?

Lenkov: Even though I grew up in Montreal, I was enamored with the team even as a kid. I had the Walter Payton poster hanging on my wall.

When I moved to Chicago, I was astounded at how that team remains so popular; people seem to have an insatiable taste for them and look back on the team with incredible affection, love and memories. When we started the company, I found the fact that no one has already done a documentary on them surprising, and it just made me think I had to get it done. We got some great feedback when it aired on PBS last year.

CL: What does Chila Productions have in the pipeline right now?

Lenkov: There are a lot of things that I can't talk about yet, but we're in preproduction on a horror movie that will be really cool. I love horror movies and have a lifelong passion for that space, and we've talked to some big names in the horror industry for that.

We are also working on a live production in Vegas that will feature some of the most prominent sports names over the last 30 years appearing live. The concept is that all of these athletes have something unique in common that we won't yet reveal and each athlete will tell their story on stage at the end. There will be some meet-and-greet opportunities. It's pretty exciting.

CL: Do you have a goal for the future of Chila Productions?

Lenkov: Our goal is to get an EGOT [the Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony quadfecta first mentioned on the sitcom "30 Rock"] by 2020 (laughs). We're always going to be small and we want to stay local — we have a lot of great connections and lots of people have been incredibly supportive of our company. We plan to continue using a lot of local resources while also availing ourselves of the L.A. market very heavily. CL

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