



## Deer Park Middle School

Dan Huffman

**Summary:** The projects that Dan Huffman's students work are not just for class; often times, they help fund their very program. His students work with the local fire department to produce training videos, document special events, and have even won a grant with the state of Washington to shoot a video on freeway trouble spots.

**F**inding funding for video tools in the classroom has been a constant challenge for teachers, and with budget issues effecting schools across the country, this is now especially true. Being able to provide students with the best tools available for their education requires creativity on the part of administrators and teachers. In the case of Dan Huffman, he's been able to leverage a variety of resources – from state grants to partnerships with local government – to build an outstanding video production class that has worked on a wide variety of projects. And more often than not, Sonicfire Pro has helped his students create outstanding soundtracks for their videos.

Huffman leads a video production program for 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders at Deer Park Middle School, a school of about 500 students in Deer Park, Washington. The program also services the occasional production needs of the local high school and school district.

Like many other schools in the early 1990s, Deer Park Middle School took advantage of the Channel One program, which provided closed-circuit TV systems as part of their "News for Teens" programming. Huffman immediately put this system to work for the students, creating a school-wide campus news-oriented "Daily Bulletin." Low-end cameras, switchers, and VCRs were used and makeshift sets and props were created in corner of Huffman's computer classroom.

In 1997 the school completed a total remodel, and the staff agreed that a dedicated production area was a must. Building this provided the needed space for a studio and editing suite. Unfortunately, funds were limited and older video equipment needed to be used. Huffman was dedicated to getting the best equipment for his students, and that meant looking in a variety of ways for funding. His role as a volunteer firefighter and EMT with the city of Deer Park gave him an intriguing option.

"This relationship allowed me to see the production needs that the fire department had," Huffman said. "I proposed a cooperative with them, which created a revenue source for our growing department. They needed a facility and expertise and we needed financial support."

Using the joint funding capabilities available by working with the fire department, Huffman was able to build an impressive roster of equipment for the production department. Along with the existing DV cameras, it now includes two dedicated editing computers, one with Media 100 and another with Final Cut Pro. Huffman's students work with the fire department's production team to create a variety of projects. These include training videos, memorials, fire recruit school highlights and annual banquets.

By increasing the quality of equipment, Huffman has been able to do projects that help fund the program. His students worked with the fire department to win a state grant to produce a video on



dangerous traffic corridors. Huffman's students edited the video that was shot by the fire department using their main NLE.

In addition to work with the fire department, Huffman's students work on a variety of outside projects. They have produced two information videos for district bond measures, and currently produce highlight videos for the Deer Park High School football and basketball teams. Students also have worked on local community history projects, memorials and family wedding anniversary projects.

Before his students started using royalty-free soundtrack creation tools, Huffman admits that they were usually using commercial CD or MIDI tracks for their projects. But with the wide range of videos his students were producing, this wasn't a feasible solution.

"Of course, with projects going public, we needed a royalty-free solution," Huffman said. "Original compositions were time intensive, and yet we needed high quality music."

Huffman also teaches music at Deer Park Middle School, so he appreciates high quality music. He says that being a music teacher makes him appreciate the quality of the music in the SmartSound library.

But the most important benefit of Sonicfire Pro for Huffman is that it saves his students time when editing their videos. Once Huffman walks them through the steps in creating a soundtrack with Sonicfire Pro, they usually have no problem getting a good result fast. The new Maestro feature, which enhances the ability to find and select music from the library, is a key feature for Huffman.

"A person can quickly hear the possibilities using the different sorting schemes," he said. "Not only can you find a song based on its category, but you usually have many good variations of it. This keeps the music fresh. We recently expanded our music library, and that's been a great help."

Huffman's students also use loop-based soundtrack creation tools, but he admits that although it's a fun program for his students to use, it isn't always a great tool for an immediate result, or for creating a wide variety of music.

"It requires some musical understanding to create a polished piece," he said. "We have imported students' WAV files into the production department for use there, but the quality is nowhere what could be produced with Sonicfire Pro. It's easy to do headbanging stuff (with loop-based tools), but if you're going to do anything else, you have to know some music."

Huffman has been very impressed with the quality of soundtracks his students can create. Soundtracks produced for bond measures and the most recent high school football highlight DVD have been outstanding, but one soundtrack sticks out in Huffman's mind. His students produce a yearly video documenting the MADD-sponsored Mock Crash at Deer Park High School, and the soundtrack accompanying this past year's footage was particularly good.

"In particular, there's a scene where a 'deceased' student is slowly loaded into the hearse," Huffman said. "The music at that point combined with the visuals and made a very high emotional impact."