

FilmDistrict to Release 'Soul Surfer'

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Film based on the true story of teen surfer Bethany Hamilton will be company's first film.

FilmDistrict, the new distribution company under the GK Films umbrella, will release "Soul Surfer," the true story of teen surfer Bethany Hamilton, as its first film.

The movie, which stars Dennis Quaid, Helen Hunt, AnnaSophia Robb and Carrie Underwood in her film debut, will hit theaters nationwide on April 15. Hamilton survived a shark attack, in which she lost her left arm. In 2003, she returned to surfing, winning the ESPY Award for best comeback athlete of the year the following year.

FilmDistrict is partnering with Sony's Tristar Pictures label for the movie's release, with FilmDistrict managing its marketing campaign.

Directed by Sean McNamara, "Sufer" was independently financed by Enticing Entertainment and Island Film Group, and is a production of Mandalay Vision, Brookwell McNamara Entertainment and Life's A Beach Entertainment.

The Affirm Films division of Sony Pictures Worldwide Acquisitions, with which FilmDistrict is working closely, acquired North American and other international rights prior to the beginning of production.

The screenplay, based on Hamilton's memoir "Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family and Fighting to Get Back on the Board," was written by McNamara, Michael Berk, Douglas Schwartz and Deborah Bonann Schwartz, with additional writing by Ron Bass, Jen Smolka and Kara Holden.

The film, shot on location in Hawaii, was produced by David Zelon, Douglas Schwartz, David Brookwell, McNamara and Roy "Dutch" Hofstetter, and executive produced by David Tice and Dominic Ianno.

"Steve Bersch and I immediately responded to the honesty of Bethany's story and its universal message of courage and perseverance," said Peter Schlessel, CEO of FilmDistrict, who initiated and approved the production with Bersch while at Sony, and then forged the partnership between Sony and the newly formed FilmDistrict for release of the film.

"It's the perfect family film for the spring break season," Bob Berney, Film District theatrical distribution president said.