



Associated Press

Bethany Hamilton survived a shark attack and became a pro surfer.

ON THE HORIZON | By Alexandra Cheney

Studio Hopes Surfer's Story Appeals To Faith, Family and Sports Crowds

When she was 13 years old, Bethany Hamilton lost her left arm in a shark attack off the coast of Kauai, Hawaii, in 2003. Driven by her love of surfing and bolstered by her Christian faith, Ms. Hamilton returned to the ocean one month after the attack and achieved her goal of becoming a professional surfer by 17.

Now Ms. Hamilton is traveling around the country to promote "Soul Surfer," a Tristar Sony Pictures film based on her story. Her appearances are one part of the multifaceted marketing plan for the film, according to Bob Berney, president of distribution for FilmDistrict, a theatrical marketing and distribution company that is handling the release of the film.

"The core story is a family story and a sports story and a faith story," said Mr. Berney. To appeal to those groups, FilmDistrict has created a schedule of outreach screenings, some with Affirm Films, a subsidiary of Sony Corp.'s Sony Pictures that focuses on gospel and faith-centered projects, to promote the movie's family and faith-based message. Other screenings are being supported by sunglasses company Maui Jim and international surf-

ing brand Rip Curl to highlight the extreme-sports side of the film. FilmDistrict also has created two websites, one an "official ministry resource site" and another that emphasizes youth empowerment, Mr. Berney said.

In what some critics saw as an attempt to soften the Christian themes, producers reportedly digitally removed the words "Holy Bible" from the cover of a book in one scene. According to various news reports, the real-life Hamilton family complained and at a recent screening the words appeared. "A tip of the hat to Christianity is not enough to create advocacy within the church," said Greg Stielstra, author of the book "Faith Based Marketing."

"Soul Surfer" also features country singer Carrie Underwood in her first film role. Ms. Underwood told the Journal in December that she was drawn to the movie's inspirational themes. "We've reached out to her fan base, to country-music fans, which goes to the family-audience approach," Mr. Berney said.

To capitalize on the spring-break holiday as well as Easter, the film is slated for release on 2,000 screens nationwide April 8.

Estimated Box-Office Figures, Through Sunday

FILM	DISTRIBUTOR	SALES, IN MILLIONS		
		THEATERS	WEEKEND*	CUMULATIVE
1. Battle: Los Angeles	Sony/Columbia	3,417	\$36.0	\$36.0
2. Rango	Paramount	3,923	23.1	68.7
3. Red Riding Hood	Warner Bros.	3,030	14.1	14.1
4. The Adjustment Bureau	Universal	2,847	11.5	38.5
5. Mars Needs Moms	Disney	3,117	6.8	6.8

*Friday, Saturday and Sunday Source: Hollywood.com