

Taking Chance may win Emmy

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“Taking Chance,” the made-for-TV movie about the experiences of now-retired Michael Strobl, who escorted the body of Lance Cpl. Chance Phelps home to Dubois after the young Marine was killed in Iraq in 2004, was nominated for a 2009 Primetime Emmy Award for “Best TV Movie.”

The Emmy nominations were announced Thursday morning, July 16.

The HBO-made film earned nine other nominations, including one for actor Kevin Bacon, who played Strobl, as a pick for the top actor in a miniseries or movie category.

“Taking Chance” was created based on the writings of Strobl as he accompanied Phelps’s body back to his childhood hometown in Fremont County. Phelps was killed by hostile fire on April 9, 2004, in Al Anbar Province, Iraq.

Strobl earned an Emmy nomination in the writing category, as did director Ross Katz, who also was selected for directing and the overall movie nomination as the executive producer.

The film also was nominated in the art direction, editing, main title design, music composition, sound editing and sound mixing categories.

“I’m absolutely thrilled,” Katz said in a telephone interview last Thursday morning. “These 10 nom-

inations in a lot of ways are nominations for Chance. He’s the reason for this.”

Phelps had been serving as a member of Major General John Kelly’s personal security detachment when he was killed by hostile fire. The HBO movie begins with Phelps’s death through explosions and gunfire heard over a black screen.

The film goes on to depict the journey of Phelps’s remains from Iraq to Dubois over the course of eight days through the eyes of his escort, Strobl.

“It’s all about recognizing Chance, his family, the town of Dubois and of course Lt. Strobl,” Katz said. “It’s wonderful recognition for a film like this.

“Telling this kind of a story is such a privilege and honor. We want as many people as possible to know this story and know the name of Chance Phelps.

“Already millions of people have seen the movie. Now, through these nominations, many more will get to know who Chance is and what he did for his country.”

From the tender preparation of the body at Dover Port Mortuary at the Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, to the careful loading of the casket to be transported, Strobl’s trip with Phelps’s remains was a powerful one.

Bacon, playing Strobl, slowly saluted the casket each time it was loaded or unloaded onto a vehicle

or an airplane, and he never was far away from his cargo, even sleeping in the airport baggage department to be near the body.

Along the way, baggage handlers, flight attendants and other passengers obviously were touched by Strobl’s mission, offering their own prayers and gifts as a token of gratitude for his and Phelps’s service. And when he drove behind the hearse carrying Phelps’s body from Montana to Dubois, a caravan of vehicles, with headlights on, joined Strobl on the highway to escort Phelps along the highway.

In Dubois, Strobl spent time with many members of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars and other Dubois residents, who gave him insight into Phelps’s life before joining the Marines. Before the funeral, Strobl finally met John Phelps and Gretchen Mack, the parents of the deceased, along with Chance’s sister, Kelly.

Strobl then gave the family Chance’s personal effects, which Strobl had kept near his body throughout his journey: Chance’s dog tags, a watch still set to Baghdad time, a wooden cross on a lanyard and a St. Christopher medal, both given to Chance by his grandmother.

The movie was shown in Dubois on Feb. 18 before its official TV premier to a standing-room-only crowd of 900 to 1,000 in the Dubois High School gymnasium. The film

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currently is available on DVD.

After the movie was shown in Dubois, Phelps's mother said she had requested that HBO include Dubois for a premiere.

"I thought it would be a nice gesture to the community," Mack said at the time. "They were all here when Chance died. And now it has come full circle, to show the film in the same place where the funeral was held."

Producer Brad Krevoy, who initiated the film's creation, said in February it was highly unusual for a film company to have a local screening, but he was glad HBO honored Mack's wishes to show the film in Phelps's hometown.

"It's a fitting tribute to have the final premier in Dubois, sitting in the gym where Chance was a student and later where his funeral was held," Krevoy said after the movie showed. "It helped to share in the community...and hear the support of those in attendance."

Also making the trip to Dubois was Katz and several HBO public relations employees.

"Coming to Dubois to show the film at the end of our run...has been an enormous privilege," Katz said in February. "It's places like Dubois, and Dubois in particular, that are the heartbeat of this country. ...The Phelps and Mack families represent for me the best of who we are as a people. They inspire me, and they make me want to be a better person. Their son makes me want to be a better person, and I hope upon hope that (the film) is a testament to the strength of families like theirs and the strength of us as a nation."

Katz, 38, has been nominated for one other Emmy and two Academy Awards during his career. He also won a Golden Globe as producer for the movie "Lost in Translation."

-Ranger staff writer Katie Roenigk contributed to this story.