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Award-winning editor saving Novato family history

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Affordable movie cameras have long given families the ability to record special moments and relive important memories. But as tapes wore down, hours of unedited footage built up, and entertainment expectations rose across the board, what was once an inexpensive hobby created a lucrative industry for editing and video transfer professionals such as Alan Kolsky.

Kolsky, who owns the Novato-based Digital Video Solutions, has been working independently in a high-tech home studio for six years. He's done work for professional athletes, won an international award for his editing, and secured repeat employment editing videos for the famous/infamous Dr. Elmo, the entertainer responsible for the Christmas song "Granny Got Run Over by a Reindeer."

"I describe myself as a video editor," said Kolsky. "I can take people's videos and films and slides and photos and either preserve them through archiving, or turn them into a much more finished program. It's all about saving memories."

High quality work has attracted Kolsky his notable list of clients.

"I've done a lot of work for some of the tennis professionals in the county," he said. "Dr. Elmo, I do a lot of work for his case. I produced a music video called 'Christmas Across the U.S.A.,' and that will be rereleased ... in all the Wal-Mart stores nationwide."

But it's the personal stories that capture Kolsky's imagination.

"I did one program last year, 'Shot down in the Solomon Islands,' that won (an award for distinction at the Communicator Awards). That was for a lady in Belvedere, whose father was a flyer in World War II, and had a very intriguing story about he and his brother. They were both Marine aviators, and one got shot down ... and was recovered by native coast watchers ... it was quite an emotional thing for everyone in the family to see and hear recounted first-hand."

That familial emotion is a part of the business Kolsky said he valued most.

"I was involved in banking, and my company got acquired," said Kolsky, who was let go in the transition. "I realized ... that when your company goes away and you get laid off, that your experience in the large corporate world doesn't mean a whole lot ... (with my business) customers are really thrilled, and they react well to finished projects. People will sit here crying, and you realize that you're having an impact on them in a very important way. People are just really enthusiastic about being able to see part of their family experience."

Putting a video together often requires an objective eye, Kolsky said.

"People come in with tapes from their vacations, and they've shot 15 hours and want it cut to one," he said. "The shooting might be poor ... but I can spot a highlight and see what might be worth salvaging for the long haul."

Using those clips, Kolsky applies high-end equipment to maximize video quality, while relying on his sense as an editor to bring out the hidden narrative."

"I work with what I'm given, and sometimes its pretty shaky material," he said. "Still, there are editing techniques that can make some dramatic changes for the better ... you can figure out how to bring continuity to their story ... (The World War II video) involved getting audio recordings of the father, ... and getting photographic background information and video effects to compliment the program," he said. "But when it's all done you pop it in and it looks like something that could be playing on the history channel"

Not all business can be personal, however, even in the home-movies industry.

"Businesses realize lots of people now are becoming very visually-oriented ... presenters want video Power Point," said Kolsky. "With product promotion, you can show in minutes (a product's) virtues.

The Internet has also created a need for video-editing.

"A short video seems to be quite persuasive for this generation of consumers. People are posting videos on YouTube like crazy," said Kolsky. "Business clients more commonly now request video not only for DVD but also in a more compressed format for the Web. The Web is where everything resides these days."

Being able to provide different formats and levels of quality requires Kolsky's home studio to be flexible and up to date.

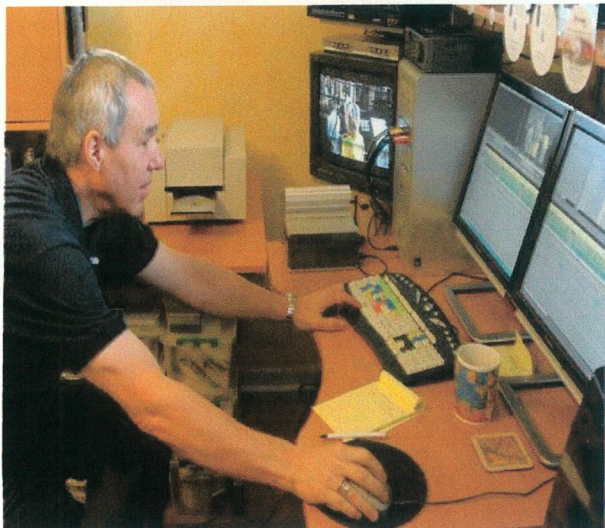
"There's ongoing training required, the software is constantly getting more complex," he said. "High definition is the next generation ... and one aspect is that it's in widescreen, 16 by nine inches ... in the markets I serve, they're not even requesting it yet, (but) I'm capable of editing high definition."

If the technical learning curve is constant, the life-experience of running a small business is worth it, Kolsky said.

"It's been a fascinating experience, and I have such regard for small business people who really have a passion for what they do," he said. "We always looked towards larger corporate

entities in banking, but both, the small business guys really have to hustle. It's gratifying on one hand, and on the other, it's a tremendous amount of work."

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SHEILA MASSON/ADVANCE Alan Kolsky, founder and owner of Digital Video Dimensions, operates equipment in his state-of-the-art video-editing studio.