

## **Director's Statement:**

Courage does, in fact, come in small packages. JJ House of Mount Vernon, Ohio, is an inspiration to his community and beyond for overcoming many obstacles. Working with JJ and his family on this documentary has been nothing shy of an honor and privilege. Always upbeat (except in the morning), JJ's outlook on life is positive, and his love of story-telling (especially in the theater and film world) is as passionate as anyone I have ever met. From the beginning of the first pre-production meetings, my team knew that this was going to be a special story that can inspire communities around the world. When we received support from Theatrical Rights Worldwide (TRW) in New York for JJ to direct the musical *How I Became A Pirate*, the project snowballed into something even more special.

For me, there are many lessons that The JJ Project offers audiences. First, dreams are important and are the essence of our *raison d'etre*. JJ's dream to direct a musical at age 11 from his wheelchair, battling an excruciating brittle bone disease daily, and overcoming significant challenges from birth to his current age is a reason for living. Second, his production team of youth, all theater friends, was matched, each youngster with an adult mentor, for this musical. The aim was to assure strong and sustainable entertainment for the community. Most of the children, including JJ, have been on stage. This experience, however, put them behind the scenes to produce the show. Musical direction, choreography, producing, stage managing, and, of course, directing were all conducted by children whose experience will last them a lifetime. For the community, this project assures that these young people will continue with the arts, either professionally or through community theatre which is particularly important in smaller communities.

Third, the theater is a wonderful option for growth, creativity, and developing a network of friends. People who participate in theater know exactly what this means. The theater provides options for people of all ages to shine, either on stage or behind the stage. The friendships and relationships that result are often referred to as the "theater family." Finally, people with disabilities offer our world a unique perspective. We should all strive to be inclusive of this group. People First of Ohio, one of the Associate Producers of the film, has become quite an influence in the State of Ohio and beyond. We are all reminded in the name of this organization that people with disabilities are people first.

The passion for this project was like nothing Mount Vernon, Ohio, had ever seen. Expectations were high from the very beginning. Community theatre is about sharing our gifts with our community and a willingness to share what is significant about the human experience on a most personal level. I look forward to sharing this story with the world. Our hope is that this story will show other communities how to do the same

in “The JJ Project Electronic Press Kit,” Page 2, The [JJproject.org](http://TheJJproject.org) order to brighten the world by creating memorable experiences and performances that people will talk about for many years.

**Production Stills:**

**Watch Movie Teaser:** <https://youtu.be/pnYEX7b3IYo>

**IMDb Page:** [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3587048/?ref\\_=ttmd\\_md\\_nm](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3587048/?ref_=ttmd_md_nm)

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