



HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

Giving Back to Education

HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!

Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments.

Sincerely,

*Teresa Kroll, Chairman
HPS Foundation Committee*

Ryan Ehrenberg - Class of 2002

Ehrenberg's Artistic Talents Lead to Career in Video Game Visual Effects

By Kristine Jacobson

Creating video games seemed like an unlikely career for a farm kid from rural Nebraska.

Ryan Ehrenberg grew up north of Holdrege and spent much of his childhood playing outside near the wide-open corn and soybean fields with his siblings and friends. He was the youngest of six children, and his family didn't even own a video game console.

But the 2002 HHS graduate, who was known for doodling in class, turned his artistic talents into a career as a visual effects artist and has helped create popular video games such as "Titanfall" and the new "Titanfall 2" that was released in October.

Early Talent

Ryan attended the former R-4 School, where class sizes ranged from three to nine students. At the small rural school, Ryan became known as the class artist, often drawing when he should have been studying. "At one point, this doodling got me into trouble with Mrs. (Lynn) Hasselquist in third grade," Ryan said. "Other students had noticed my talent and requested Ninja Turtle (marker) tattoos. This was not deemed an appropriate use of class time."

Eventually, R-4 hired an art teacher - Mrs. Brandy Edgren - who encouraged Ryan to explore a career as a future art teacher because of his talent.

In high school, Ryan enrolled in every art class he could at Holdrege High

School. He was encouraged by art teacher Mrs. Christy Kosmicki and other teachers as well. His English teacher, Mrs. Diana Sall, noticed Ryan doodling on his lined writing paper. "She thought it deserved a better showcase," Ryan said. "One day she gave me a sketchbook so my drawings could look a bit more official."

But it was his selection into the ESU 11's Summer Honors Art Program his junior year that led to his current career path. "The arts program was helmed by David Stallings from Colorado," Ryan said. "We were taught traditional cell animation and created a short film in a two-week period. I ended up doing quite a bit of animation on the project, and David saw that this

was a potential career path for me. This was a key moment where I realized I could turn my art into a career."

Ryan graduated from HHS in 2002, and after finishing his summer employment at the local discount-store Pamida, he ventured out of the familiar cornfields of Phelps County to the bustling city of Santa Ana, California, where he attended the Art Institute of California-Orange County.

"My sister and brother-in-law were living in Southern California around this time and suggested that I go to school there where the art jobs would be," Ryan said. "I chose California over the Denver school because of the potential employment opportunities. My HHS guidance counselor recommended against it. He seemed to have little faith in such an untraditional path."

Education and Career Beginnings

At the art institute, Ryan studied Media Arts and Animation, expecting to lean toward a career in film or television. The school helped him develop his traditional art skills into more job-specific skills. He learned about storyboarding, lighting, and animation. He used his new skills to create a short senior film project called "Oliver," which was selected to air on IFC (Independent Film Channel) as a Media Labs Winner.



Ryan Ehrenberg - Titanfall

Ryan showed his film at his senior portfolio show, and it caught the attention of Chris Naves, a Senior Artist at the game studio Shiny Entertainment. Ryan kept in touch with Chris but didn't land a job right away.

"After graduating, while waiting to get that first elusive art job, I took a position testing games at a company called Crave Entertainment," Ryan said. "Yes, there are people who get paid to play video games; no, this isn't as fun as it sounds. Testing usually requires playing a game that you aren't terribly interested in and in a manner that takes much of the fun out of it. It still was a great job at the time and helped me feel like I was on the right path toward the game industry."

Eventually, Chris Naves offered Ryan a job in visual effects or VFX. "In school I had taken some classes in VFX, but they didn't appeal to me," Ryan said. "They required setting up a complicated scenario then waiting patiently while it rendered out. This could take hours or days depending on the complexity of the scene. I had little interest in this."

But, Ryan decided to apply for the job anyway and was honest with his employer about his less-than-enthusiastic attitude and experience in VFX. He was hired, and it turned out he loved VFX projects.

"Once I started working in VFX, I realized it was for me," Ryan said. "I got to work on many aspects of the game, and it provided a creative challenge that I loved."

He worked for Shiny Entertainment, which later sold, merged, and was rebranded as Double Helix Games, for six years leaving as the Lead VFX Artist. During his time there, he was part of the creative team on several projects including a PSP (Playstation Portable) fighting game and then a game based on "The Golden Compass" movie that released in 2007. He also led the VFX team on "The Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters" video game that was released in June 2011.

In the fall of 2012, he was offered a job at Respawn Entertainment, a new game company formed by industry veterans including many who worked at the studio that made the successful "Call of Duty" franchise. At Respawn, Ryan was one of two VFX artists on the "Titanfall" game that was released in March 2014. He then began work on the sequel "Titanfall 2" that launched in October 2016. Ryan worked on many aspects of "Titanfall 2," including weapons, levels, cinematic moments and the finale.

A Fulfilling Career

Ryan said his days at Respawn vary depending on his current tasks, but he spends most of his day in the "particle editor" making VFX for characters, weapons or levels.

"I've had some amazing memories working at Respawn," Ryan said. "When we announced "Titanfall," we had hundreds of people waiting in four-hour lines just to see the game. We got to show the game to Steven Spielberg and Shigeru Miyamoto (the creator of Mario and Zelda at Nintendo). People sometimes stop me in the street if I have a Respawn shirt on to tell me what a fan they are."

But what he enjoys most is being paid to create and use his artistic talents. "I still do my own art outside of work, but I love that most of that itch is scratched while making a cool project with awesome people," Ryan said. "We have a studio that is built for us. There's tons of perks at work from kitchens stocked with snacks and soda to ping-pong and pool. We have an amazing gym that I need to spend more time in. Everyone there is super talented and driven."

Sometimes, Ryan said even great companies like Respawn get into periods of long nights of work, also called "crunch." "This seems to be a standard in the industry, but Respawn has been the best at balancing this when needed," he said. "I will say that when I tell my dad about these hours, he jokes that I'm doing 'farmer hours,' so maybe it's in my blood.

Ryan said he appreciates his parents, Keith and Beverly Ehrenberg, for letting



Ryan and Cassie Ehrenberg

him pursue this career and said that having a supportive family is a big part of his current success. "I have an awesome family," Ryan said. "My parents took a major gamble on letting their 18-year-old drive across the country for college in a field they didn't know."

Ryan married his wife, Cassie, in 2007, and they have two "furry children of canine descent."

Ryan is looking forward to continuing his work in the video game industry with the goal of someday being able to save enough money to purchase a home in southern California.

To view some of Ryan's artwork, follow him on Instagram at

<https://www.instagram.com/mysteryberg/>.

About Us

The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.

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