

## TRICK 3D Studios

By Jessa Jansen

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Crafting imaginative stories for the entire family, Atlanta-based Chad Eikhoff directs and creates worlds using real-time 3D animation that can then extend into immersive content. At his studio, located in King Plow Arts Center, Chad Eikhoff and the team at TRICK 3D bring stories to life through real-time animation techniques. “Chad’s approach is to first create detailed virtual worlds and then set his stories within those worlds as opposed to telling stories frame by frame,” shares TRICK 3D’s studio head, Stacy Shade. “This approach is perfectly suited to utilizing the latest in real-time gaming engine technology.”

Using real-time gaming software called Unreal Engine by Epic Games, Eikhoff explains that “Real-time animation techniques (similar to those used by *Fortnite*) are now being used in larger-scale, narrative animation projects to create high-quality, character-driven content.” Chad Eikhoff and TRICK 3D Studios have been using the Unreal Engine (UE) since 2015. One of the first times the team began to understand the power the engine could offer to immersive storytelling was with a work titled *Zayden’s Wish*, which was an immersive, VR short using UE created for a special boy who wished to go to Saturn on a red rocket ship for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Outside of his immersive work, Eikhoff is best-known for directing, writing and producing the special-turned-classic *The Elf on the Shelf: An Elf’s Story*. Chad explains that, “through storytelling, I can build and create wonderful places to go and craft visual content families can appreciate together.” When developing the television special for the popularized book *The Elf on the*



Chad Eikhoff and Stacy Shade



Photos courtesy of TRICK 3D Studios

*Shelf*, Chad Eikhoff built the world of the North Pole first and then set the characters and story inside of it.

Now, Eikhoff is set to create a new series, also set at the North Pole, *The Jolliest Elf*. The series of shorts are an animated reality competition series that will introduce audiences to elves and other members of Santa’s village (such as the host, Mr. Jingles) as they all compete to showcase their own talents and allow viewers to actually vote for their favorite elves (think an animated version of *American Idol* set at the North Pole, with elves). The series, which utilizes Epic Games’ Unreal Engine gaming engine, is in production now and will release during this year’s holiday season. The series includes 12 episodes with each episode at seven minutes each.

Outside of *The Jolliest Elf* production, Eikhoff recently announced TRICK 3D’s partnership in one of Atlanta’s first extended reality, XR stages, in partnership

with Music Matters Productions. The Music Matters XR Stage is located in Norcross at the Music Matters headquarters and now available for booking for virtual production of music videos, virtual concerts, feature film shoots, and more. The XR stage is equipped with LED panel walls, ceiling and floor. The LED XR stage combines with 360-virtual backgrounds and renders using Epic Games’ Unreal Engine. This stage technique allows for real-time image tracking, composite, and recording.

“Georgia is leading across sectors from film and music, to technology and business, and the Music Matters XR Stage pushes what’s possible in content production for all those industries,” remarks Eikhoff.

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