

# Westenbrink takes on **Degrassi: The Next Generation**



Film stocks  
KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 and KODAK VISION2 250D 5205

*Degrassi: The Next Generation* is the fourth instalment of the popular *Degrassi* television franchise created by Linda Schuyler and Kit Hood. The original series, *The Kids of Degrassi Street*, first aired in 1982 and was followed by *Degrassi Junior High* and *Degrassi High*.

This latest chapter of the Canadian teen drama follows a group of *Degrassi* Community School students who are encountering the many trials and tribulations of adolescence. Self image, sexual identity, peer pressure, gang violence and child abuse are just some of the subjects showcased.

"It integrates everyday teenage life experiences that people can relate to in one way or another," cinematographer Jim Westenbrink, CSC says. "The show has a true-to-life aspect that a young audience can relate to. The realism is what makes *Degrassi* stand apart from other high school shows. Our audience can watch an episode and say, 'I knew someone who went through that.'"

*Degrassi: The Next Generation*, which is produced in Super 16mm film format, is primarily filmed on soundstages and the back lot at Epitome Pictures studios in Toronto with occasional scenes shot on location. It takes three-and-a-half days to shoot each episode.

"With today's budget and time restraints, we need to be flexible," Westenbrink says. "We usually have two cameras rolling, and cross shooting is what helps us achieve our days."

His camera package includes two ARRI 16 SR cameras and a set of Cooke 35mm lenses.

"Since we have different directors every week, it is very important for me to help them create the shots that are consistent with our show," Westenbrink says. "For example, we rarely have camera angles that look down on our kids, close-ups are mandatory, and any new camera set-ups have to be pre-approved." Westenbrink also keeps the light soft enough that he does not need much filtration in front of the lens.

"I try to maintain an overall look of reality," he explains. "When I light a scene I mostly rely on the script. Whether the mood is happy or sad reflects the way I embrace and light the scene. If it's a happy moment with someone dancing in early morning shafts of light or if someone gets shot in an alley, the lighting should be right for the time, place and moment. I also always keep in mind that audiences love to watch beautiful people."

*Degrassi: The Next Generation* is recorded on KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 and VISION2 250D 5205 films composed in 16:9 aspect ratio. "The latitude with the 7219 stock and the low grain element really enhances the look," Westenbrink remarks. "There is no doubt in my mind that the latitude with the Kodak stocks and the richness of color is much stronger than any digital format. The show airs in HD, and by starting with a very clear Kodak negative that process becomes much clearer, sharper, and more colorful."

The show is posted at Technicolor in Toronto by colorist Ross Cole. "Ross and I have worked together for years," says Westenbrink. "We talk almost daily, and I usually get to go to the suite with notes. I try to shoot as close as possible to the final look, and then he takes our vision to the next level, so it is very important to have open communication."

*Degrassi: The Next Generation* airs in primetime on the CTV network in Canada, and on The N, a cable channel for teens in the United States.

