

# Sioux Center NEWS

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# 'The Fourth World'

  

## Film documents real people, real world, real stories

By Renee Wielenga  
Meet Selma.

Her native country, Guatemala, is one of the worst places to live for a woman, and her story is one example of why.

To sum it up, this woman was sold into the sex trade by her mother at age 9. At age 13, she got out and went to live with her dad, who raped her and she became pregnant.

"That's enough story right there, but it's just the beginning," said Mark Volkers, digital media professor at Dordt College in Sioux Center. "It's just incredible. I've never heard a story like that."

Selma's story is just one of many Volkers heard while traveling to Guatemala, Kenya, Philippines, India and Senegal throughout the past three years to create his recently completed documentary called "The Fourth World."

Although made by a Christian, "The Fourth World" is a secular film that presents stories of real people living in the slums.

A slum, according to the United Nations, has a lack of access to clean water, security, improved sanitation and secu-



(Photo submitted)

**VOLKERS FOCUSES,**  
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Mark Volkers of Orange City, who is a digital media professor at Dordt College in Sioux Center, overlooks the Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya. Kibera is the largest slum in

Nairobi and the second largest urban slum in Africa. The footage taken is included in his recently completed documentary called "The Fourth World."

## NEWS

# Volkers focuses documentary on slums

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ity of tenure meaning most slum dwellers don't own their property.

The United Nations estimates nearly one billion people live in the slums globally.

"There's nothing romantic about the slums," Volkers said. "They smell. They're dangerous. Slum residents wonder why on earth you're there."

So why was he there?

"No one will ever understand what a billion people is, but like Selma, this film gives a few faces to the billion people that live in the slums," Volkers said. "We may be only hearing the story of one, but it's a story that resonates with other people in these types of situations."

Volkers, who lived in Africa for seven years and spent 15 years traveling throughout the developing world, has gotten to know many slum dwellers. Creating a film that explores the slums' hidden potential — the people — has been on his mind for nearly a decade.

"I'm really tired of films and commercials about the poor — you know the ones; they have pictures of children with sad, slow music — that makes us all feel guilty, but we don't do anything and go on with our own lives," Volkers said. "I thought it would be fun to make a film that presents the story from their perspective, not from our perspective."

He proposed the documentary project at Dordt College three years ago.

"It remained my project, my idea, but Dordt has a huge part because they gave me the freedom to use Dordt's equipment and students," Volkers said.

Together, throughout two Christmas breaks, a summer break and a spring break, Volkers headed film teams and interviews to let the slum dwellers tell their stories.

Using global connections, Volkers and his film students had access to some places national organizations couldn't get into. One example is Mathari Valley in Nairobi, Kenya.

"About a month before we got there, Compassion International sent a film crew to that same area we went into, but they were literally chased out because people would have hurt them," Volkers said. "Three students and I went in there with all of our gear perfectly safe because we went in with a friend of mine — a pastor who's been working there for 15 years. People trust him so we were OK."

Volkers said his documentary not only is entertaining and informative but also reveals a positive message.

"Even though many of the homes are shacks or places we wouldn't even park our car in, some people have lived there for 20 to 30 years, so that's home to them," Volkers said. "This film is very optimistic because the amount of talent and resources and potential in these slums is unbelievable, almost overwhelming, but we don't look at slums that way. 'The Fourth World' offers a new viewpoint."

While early reviews are good, Volkers said the 52-minute film doesn't have a release date set yet, as it's been entered into three large film festivals and Volkers is waiting to hear if it's accepted. The film has also been submitted to 10 smaller festivals.

"Because some festivals have a 'no screening' clause, and film festivals are important for future success of film, I can't set a date yet," Volkers said. "I want the film's premiere to be here in Northwest Iowa. I'm excited for when that will be but, right now, the film is in an odd holding pattern. Waiting — anxiously, I might add — is what I have to do right now."



(Photos submitted)

Dordt College student Piper Kroeze sets up the video shot while working with Mark Volkers in Manila, the capital of the

Philippines. Manila is the second most populous city in the Philippines with about 1.7 million residents.

## FUTURE:

Part of Mark Volkers' waiting involves finding a sales agent who can market "The Fourth World" to MIPDoc.

MIPDoc, going on March 30-31 in Cannes, France, is the world's largest international market for documentary films, as international buyers, sellers, producers and commissioners of documentary and factual programs come together to line up their programming.

Phase II of the documentary project involves recutting the film to include the Christian perspective, talking about the role of the gospel in the slum dwellers' lives.

The recut version would be made into DVD curriculum for junior high Sunday school or high school catechism use.

## FILM FACTS:

**Film title:** The Fourth World

**Produced by:** Mark Volkers through Prairie Grass Productions of Dordt College in Sioux Center  
**Countries filmed in:** Kenya, Guatemala, Philippines, India, Senegal

**Years in the making:** 2008-2011

**Hours of film taken:** more than 40

**Video run time:** 52 minutes

**Rating:** This film is approved for all audiences

**Facebook:** Search "The Slum Documentary Project"

**Online:** www.fourthworldfilm.com

**Twitter:** Search "slumdoc"



Dordt College students set up cameras to help Mark Volkers film slums in the Philippines.



Dordt College student Peter Hessels walks through a mountain of garbage in Manila, Philippines. Mark Volkers said the filming process didn't keep students clean but opened students' eyes to a different way of life.