



2025

NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

**YOUNG ALUMNI
SERVICE AWARD**

KEAGAN KARNES '14



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—Keagan Karnes '14

Keagan Karnes '14 says that directing a movie is a lot of fun: “Like being a kid with a bunch of really expensive crayons!

At age 12, Keagan followed his best friend to the Sierra Middle School media magnet program, and “fell in love with movies” with his lifelong friends Jon, Zac, Brendon, and Andrew. After high school, he had the opportunity to intern on set for the Mark Medoff film *Refuge*: “This solidified for me that this could be a real job.”

Keagan was able to pick up production assistant jobs throughout his time at NMSU, developing relationships along the way. Keagan notes, “By the time I graduated, I had a network of people who knew me and what I could do.”

The seminal moment for Keagan’s feature film career came when filmmaker and NMSU professor Ross Marks hired him to line produce *Walking with Herb*: “He took a chance on me. I was in way over my head, but I was forced to figure it out.”

Now, Keagan is working on his second directorial feature film, a comedy called *Yes, Daddy*, and his feature film directorial debut, *Love on Tap*, is scheduled for release in 2026. “It took a while to get here,” Keagan says. “I directed a lot of smaller projects. I took my time and got good at my craft.” He has also produced films like *Little Brother* starring Academy Award winner J. K. Simmons and *Sunlight*, executive produced by Christopher Guest.

Keagan co-owns the Albuquerque-based production company INSPIRADO with his partners Mary Haarmeyer and Richard Farmer. He has taught Business of Film as a visiting professor at the NMSU Creative Media Institute, and his commitment to nurturing new talent has included bringing 34 NMSU CMI students on set to obtain real-world experience when he produced the feature film *Santa’s Cousin*.

His passion for building community led to his appointment to the Governor’s Council on Film and Media, and he began his term this past January. “Everything I’ve done is in service of a larger goal: to expand opportunities in New Mexico for our storytellers.” Keagan adds, “Plus, I am a political nerd! I probably would’ve gone into politics if I hadn’t become a filmmaker. The Council is a great, non-partisan way to get involved and help the film industry in New Mexico.”

For Keagan, community begins at home: “I could not have reached this point without the support of my parents Phil and Sharon, my sisters Kelli and Kaci and their families, and especially my wife, Angelique.” In the NMSU community, he credits professors Ross Marks, Ilana Lapid, Mitch Fowler, and Amy Lanasa with championing him.

Keagan’s advice for students reflects how the film industry is transforming: “You have a golden opportunity because the industry is in flux. The new filmmakers who can understand both storytelling and business will rise. You can choose self-distribution, pursuing niche films, or the broader commercial channels. Regardless of what you choose: Find your audience, find what you like to do, and don’t take no for an answer. Then, you will thrive.” ▲