

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

URBAN LEGENDS FILM COMPANY ACQUIRES RIGHTS TO "*CHASING THE SQUIRREL*"

LOS ANGELES, CA -- September 30, 2020 -- The fascinating story of Virginia's most notorious drug smuggler – airplane pilot Wally Thrasher -- is now in development as a television series. Los Angeles-based Urban Legends Film Company has acquired the rights to *Chasing The Squirrel*, the best-selling book by author Ron Peterson, Jr.

Chasing The Squirrel is the story of legendary Southwest Virginia drug smuggler Wally Thrasher, a charismatic daredevil nicknamed “Squirrel” for his elusiveness. Thrasher made millions in the 70s and 80s, smuggling marijuana and cocaine into Florida and Virginia from Colombia, Mexico, and the Caribbean. In 1984, with the Feds hot on his tail, Thrasher allegedly died in a fiery plane crash in Belize, his body burnt to ashes. Then, his beautiful Portuguese-born wife Olga became an informant, assisting the DEA in an undercover operation that resulted in the largest drug bust in Mid-Atlantic US history, seizing over \$150 million in drugs and cash in 1986. Twelve international traffickers were brought to justice, including Bolivian drug lord Roberto Suarez Gomez, the world’s “King of Cocaine.” The focus then turned to finding Wally Thrasher, who federal authorities believe staged the plane crash, faked his own death, and is living the good life in a faraway tropical land.

“We are very excited to bring *Chasing The Squirrel* to the screen,” said Urban Legends founder/creative director Doug Tower, whose company has developed award-winning content for clients including Fox, Investigation Discovery, TLC, TNT, TBS, Travel and Discovery. “The book is one of the most incredible true crime stories I've ever read.”

Tower is a three-decade veteran of the entertainment industry whose background includes coordinating scenes on blockbuster films like *Waterworld*, *The Rock*, *Jumanji* and *Air Force One*, and TV production work on the World Series, Daytona 500 and the NBA Finals; as well as extensive work on *American Idol*. Tower has directed A-list talent including Charleze Theron, Cameron Diaz, Dwayne Johnson, Renee Zellweger and Kobe Bryant. His accolades include two local Emmys.

Also attached to the project are Urban Legends' highly-regarded producer Meghann Coleman and Director of Photography Jeff Dolen, who was cinematographer for HBO's Emmy-nominated series, "*McMillions*." Location scouting, test shots and advance film work are underway in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

Author Ron Peterson, Jr., based in Smithfield, Virginia, will serve as Executive Producer of the project, which will feature interviews with many of Peterson's sources for the book; including Thrasher's old smuggling associates and the law enforcement authorities who pursued him.

“I’m thrilled to work with Doug Tower and his team at Urban Legends,” said Peterson. “Doug is an extraordinary storyteller and his vision for this is phenomenal. All the reviewers who read *Chasing The Squirrel* felt it would make a great TV series or one-off documentary. It's the kind of story that will adapt very well to the screen.”

Peterson's previous work as an author includes the 2018 true crime classic *Under The Trestle*, which is also optioned as a film/television project, currently in development with Mactavish Pictures. *Under The Trestle* chronicles Virginia's first "No Body" murder trial; in 1980 when former Virginia Tech football player Stephen Epperly was convicted in the murder of Radford University student Gina Renee Hall, whose remains have never been found. The book was selected as one of the Top 100 true crime books of all time.