

What do you get when you cross tin foil, old computer fans, an out of date sound board and a screen? A giant talking computer, of course! How about yellow hazard tape, paint, a rubber floor and pipes? If you automatically guessed an underwater mission base, you may jump ahead to the to the next article. If you're like most of us who have grand ideas, but don't know how to make them happen, READ ON!

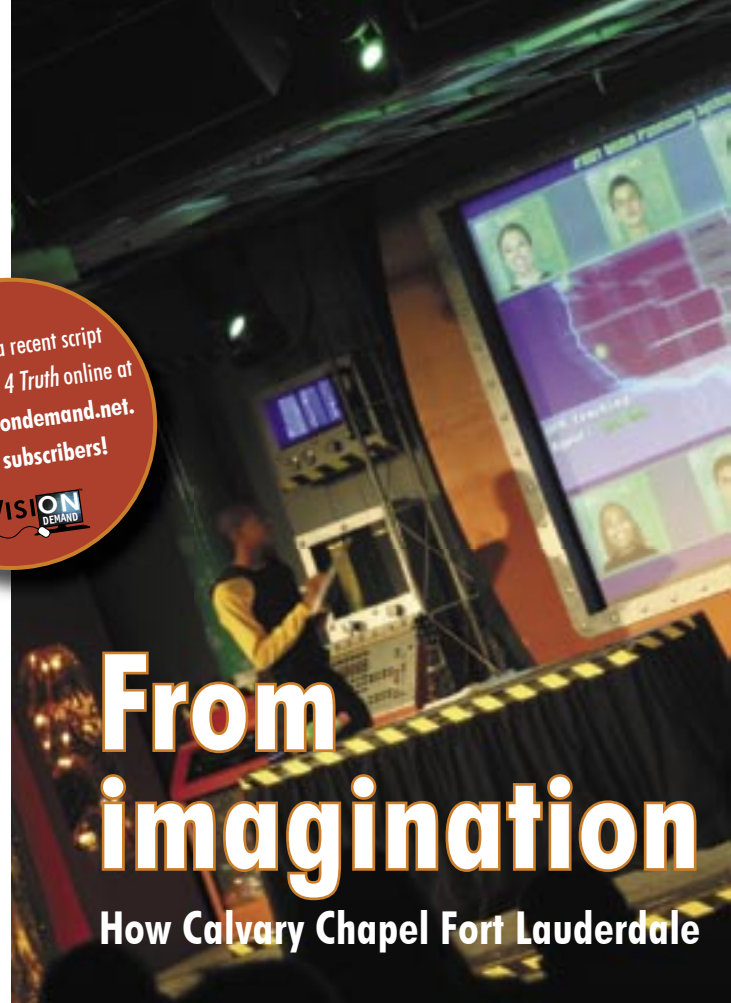
Doug Rasku, Children's Pastor at Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale invited us to take a "behind the scenes" look at how they created their Disciple Planet environment on a much lower budget than you might think.

Before the "how?" should always come the "why?" The "why?" Doug says, is to make disciples. "We make disciples by creating a fun, interactive and loving environment where kids are encouraged to grow in Christ." That's where the underwater mission base and EBOT (the gigantic talking computer) come in. Creating environments is an important step paving the way for the presentation of the Word in the program itself. "We make it so exciting in children's ministry that the lesson doesn't stop at the door," Doug says.

Some 3,000 kids per weekend (birth – 5<sup>th</sup> grade) enjoy a highly interactive curriculum that the Calvary Chapel team develops in-house. Kids are rotated between

Big Group Time and Small Group Time.

In Small Groups, kids get more in-depth teaching and hands-on learning experiences, where they actually get to conduct live experiments. For example, when you mix vinegar and baking soda in a bottle and put a balloon on top, the



# From imagination

## How Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale

Download a recent script from *Disciples 4 Truth* online at [www.visionondemand.net](http://www.visionondemand.net). Free to subscribers!



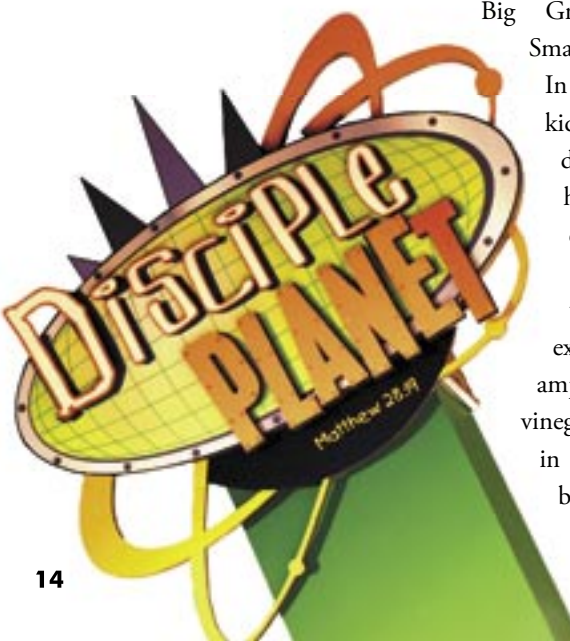
Watch clips from Doug's interview online at [www.visionondemand.net](http://www.visionondemand.net). Free to subscribers!



Children's Minister Doug Rasku in action during a *Disciples 4 Truth* service.

balloon will inflate. Small Group leaders recently used this experiment to communicate the filling of the Holy Spirit.

For Big Group Time, enter Mission-Base Alpha (aka: the underwater mission base.) Mostly built by volunteers, Mission-Base Alpha makes it look and feel like you're underwater, complete with portholes showing interesting sea creatures on the outside, realistic flooring, and pipe everywhere, Mission-Base Alpha was born out of a cross between *Spy Kids* and *Bible Man*, but set underwater (inspired by local theme parks in Florida). Fog ma-





# to impact

creates new environments to reach kids



### Animals are always a hit!

Recently, an individual in the church donated a huge aquarium to the children's ministry. They have also added reptile aquariums (disguised as crates) with chameleons, geckos, and other fun, friendly faces.

"Planet Cam," which is a pre-taped scenario using different kid actors to show the "live" situation occurring.

Following a script, the Disciples 4 Truth interact with EBOT again to pull up Bible verses showing what God says to do in their situation. They're then able to communicate God's truth, both to the kids who requested help and the kids watching the show.

So what about newcomers? Every week they show an opening movie trailer that introduces kids to the room (Mission-Base Alpha), what the giant computer is, and who these agents are. Doug says, "If you've never seen this before, you are quickly brought up to speed." At the end of the episode, the children's ministry team sometimes likes to tease them with a cliff-hanger for the next week. "The whole crowd is like 'AWWWGHHH! We can't wait 'til next week!'"



"Special agent" receives an email from a kid who needs help with a problem.

chines and special lighting add to the mystery of the base.

Big Group Time involves kids in worship, over-the-top games, and weekly live episodes that take place with a "special agent" theme in Mission Base Alpha. In each episode, actors dressed as special agents interact with EBOT, which stands for the Electronic Book of Truth. EBOT delivers electronic transmissions (video e-mails) from other kids around the world asking for help about some dilemma they have. For example, one kid asks, "My brother is picking on me... what should I do?" Agents go into action and call up the

### What's required?

There are several things that must happen to produce and present weekly episodes of *Disciples 4 Truth*. Fortu-

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**Game Time:** Crazy games are standard fare at Mission Base Alpha.

nately, the children’s ministry is able to utilize volunteers to get it together. Doug says youth volunteers are key. Whether they are acting on stage or assisting the control booth behind the scenes, Doug has found that “they are often just as committed as the adults.” Youth volunteers get a uniform to help solidify a sense of responsibility and belonging. It makes them feel “official” at the church. All youth volunteers are required to attend a youth or sanctuary service each week, and are expected to maintain a high standard in their personal lives.

Can you trust youth to run expensive, high-tech projection and audio equipment? Sure. “They’re more technology savvy than I am,” Doug laughs. “I don’t even know how to turn on the system.” One main (paid) person oversees the control booth ministry in each of the five services. Four volunteers rotate to serve for an entire weekend once



Disciple Planet incorporates nature themes throughout common areas and classrooms. The main lobby area is based on an African jungle safari look. Volunteers even dress as safari guides to keep the theme consistent.

per month. They start by rehearsing at 2 p.m. on Saturday, and then launch the weekend services on Saturday night. Doug makes sure to feed the volunteers because they are there practically all day; in addition, they set up fun areas (Nintendo, games, etc) for youth volunteers to hang out during the down-time between services.

### Get the church involved

All children under 6<sup>th</sup> grade level are requested to participate in Disciple Planet while their parents are in “big church,” but NO ONE is required to volunteer in the children’s ministry... no, not even parents! So how do they meet volunteer needs?

Doug has found that keeping the congregation involved in the exciting things happening in children’s ministry

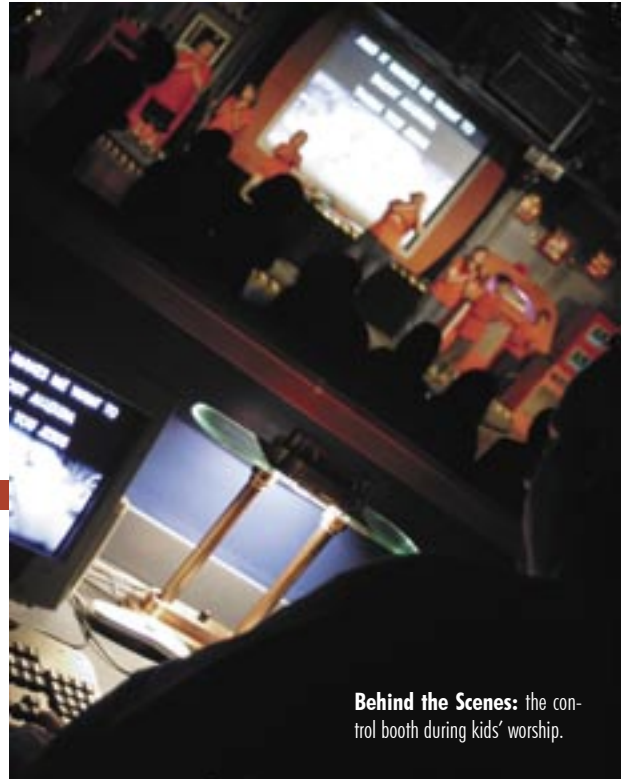
has been a powerful way to draw the volunteers they need, knowing that people are inspired by excellence and changed

lives. Recently he had the opportunity to run an actual episode of *Disciples 4 Truth* in “big church.” He found that very few people had any idea of the thought, preparation and excellence that is invested in their children every week.

After inviting the congregation to get involved, over 500 people responded with interest to volunteer! So far, they have already trained 160 people out of that group to serve, and are still in the process of conducting training classes. By dreaming big and selling others on that dream, Doug has created a ministry that people want to join. It helps that it’s just as fun for the adults as it is for the kids! ■

## How to build a mission base:

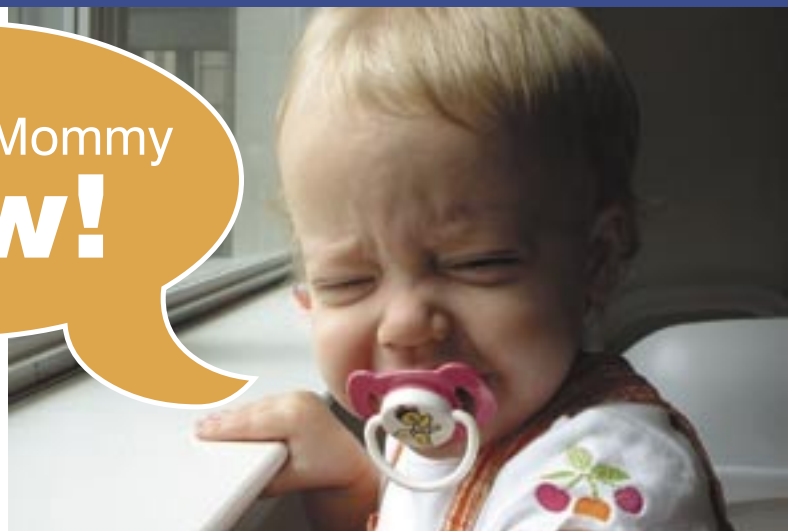
Looking for ideas for your own kid’s ministry? Turn the page for some low-cost, fun ideas using easy-to-find items. Any church can do it!



**Behind the Scenes:** the control booth during kids’ worship.

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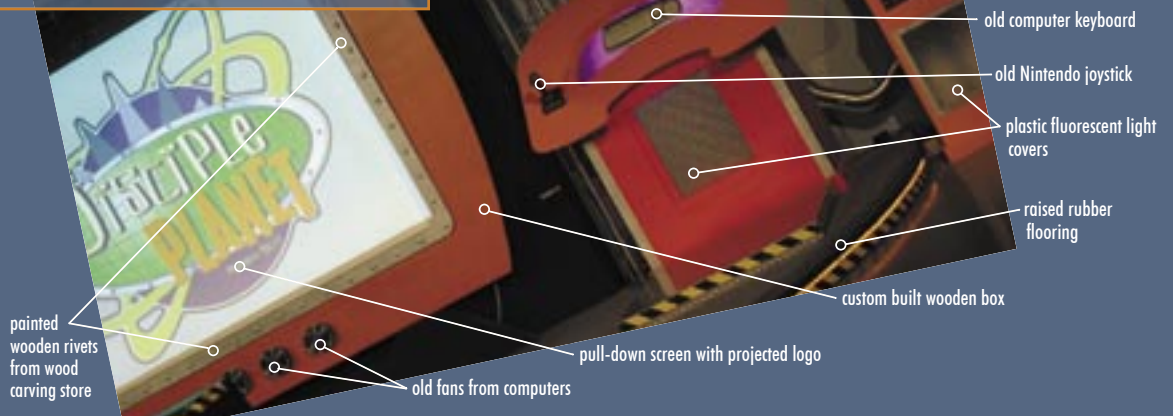
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# WHAT IS EBOT REALLY?

EBOT is actually just a projection screen with a homemade wooden frame around it painted to look like a computer. For extra effect, old computer fans (purchased at a garage sale) were built into the frame below the screen to look high-tech. Read on for other low-cost creative ideas:



# BUILDING MISSION BASE ALPHA

