



The Backgrounder

News and Information About Turning Backgrounds into Profits!

A publication of Virtual Backgrounds - ©2005

Fall Issue 2005

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Hurricane Relief We are here to help!

We have already heard of several photographers who have been adversely affected by the recent hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Our deepest heartfelt thoughts go out to each of you and your families during this troubling time.

Know that we are here to help! If you are in need of assistance to get your business back on it's feet, please [contact us](#). We will do all that we can to assist.

If you are a current owner of a Virtual Backgrounds system, please [contact us](#) immediately as we can assist in processing claims. Our knowledgeable staff can also guide you in the event that your equipment is salvageable. Again, we are here to help.

Winners Announced in the VB Annual Print Competition!

In the Summer 05 Issue of *The Backgrounder*, Virtual Backgrounds announced its annual "Best Of" print competition. This competition was open to any professional photographer who uses a Virtual Backgrounds system. The only criteria was (of course) that images submitted must have been created using a Virtual Backgrounds system.

This year's winner is Cindy Cofer (Cindy Cofer Creations) of Williamstown, Kentucky. She will receive a \$300 gift certificate to Virtual Backgrounds and is a Featured Photographer in this issue ([see page 3](#)).

Second Place goes to Teri Quance (Quance Design and Photography) of Cypress, Texas who in her first few months of owning a VB system is already producing top quality work! Teri receives a \$200 gift certificate to VB.

Third place in this year's competition are Deanne Daigle and Barbara Peterson (Reflections 2000) of Lafayette, Louisiana.

These long time owners of Virtual Backgrounds show excellent use of props and the reflect-a-floor to enhance their overall composition. Deanne and Barbara will receive a \$100 gift certificate to VB.

We would like to thank all of you who submitted excellent prints. If you did not get a chance to submit a print this year, keep checking *The Backgrounder* for an announcement for the 2006 Print Competition.



1st



2nd



3rd

Slide Sale: Prepare Now for the Upcoming Holidays!

It's that time again, the busiest season of all for professional photographers. Just in time for your upcoming holiday seasons, Virtual Backgrounds is having a sale on Christmas and Halloween slide sets. Each set is available for **25% off the regular price**. Christmas I is a set of 20 slides. Regular price: \$149. **Sale price: \$111.75.**

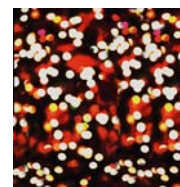
Christmas sets II, III, and the new set IV have 6 slides each. Regular price: \$69. **Sale price: \$51.75.** We now have 4 fabulous Halloween sets in stock and ready to ship. Each set of 6 slides are regularly priced at \$69. **The sale price is only \$51.75.** Click [here](#) to see these and other available sets online.



Christmas I



Christmas II



Christmas III



Christmas IV
NEW SET!



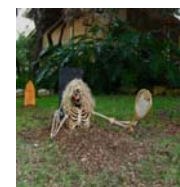
Halloween I



Halloween II



Halloween III
NEW SET!



Halloween IV
NEW SET!

ACT NOW!!! The Holiday Slide Set Sale Ends October 31, 2005!

2006 VB Workshop Schedule Announced

February 6-8
April 3-5
May 8-10
June 12-14
July 17-19
August 14-16
September 18-20
October 16-18

Grade B & Refurbished Screens Up to 50% Off!

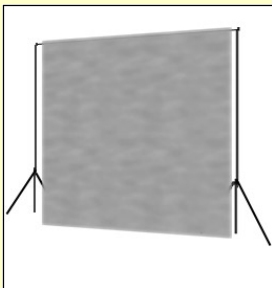
Just in time for the fall season, Virtual Backgrounds has several Grade B and refurbished projection screens available, mostly in the popular 8' x 8' size, for up to 50% off of the regular price. These screens may not be perfect, but they are ideal as a second screen for portable use at proms and sporting events.

A **Grade B** screen is a new screen that has a flaw that prevents it from being sold as a Grade A but is still a very serviceable screen, especially for other than normal portrait photography.

A **refurbished** screen is one that has been previously owned and thoroughly cleaned here at the factory.

If you are looking for a second screen, especially one for portable use, [contact](mailto:contact@virtualbackgrounds.net) Virtual Backgrounds today!

HURRY! HURRY! HURRY!
The Projection Screen Sale
Ends November 30, 2005!



VB Workshops: What To Expect When You Attend

Do I really need to attend the Virtual Backgrounds workshop? What will I learn? Is it worth my time? Are they just going to try to sell me something? What else is there to do in San Marcos?

These are common questions that we get all the time. Actually education has been a key part of the company since its very beginning, in part because the company founder and president is a former university professor.

There are two reasons to attend the workshop. First, the workshop covers the basic technical aspects of using the Virtual Backgrounds process. Secondly, and more importantly, workshops help attendees recognize the wide ranging opportunities made possible when one begins to use Virtual Backgrounds. Most photographers who start using the process use it in a very limited way. As a result of attending the workshop, attendees gain a much more broad perspective about how backgrounds can be used to build business with new customers and increase sales averages.



Many attendees arrive a day early or stay an extra day to enjoy the many central Texas attractions. The city of Austin is just 30 miles to the north of San Marcos and San Antonio is just 45 miles to the south. San Marcos is just ¼ mile from I-35 and is a delightful university town of about 45,000. It is also the home of two of the world's largest factory outlet malls. Virtual Backgrounds has special hotel rates for workshop attendees of \$45 per night.

Most attendees arrive on the first day between 8 and 9 am. The coffee is



perking. The workshop begins at 9 am with workshop coordinator Jim Wilson announcing that this will be a "no nonsense" workshop. The first portion is devoted to viewing sample images of work done with Virtual Backgrounds and discussing the good features of each image and suggestions on how some of the images can be improved.

Complementary lunch is served on our private rail road dining car which is parked next to the building. The afternoon is devoted to the technical aspects of Virtual Backgrounds with details on how to use each machine. An evening dinner on board the train follows with the main course usually cooked by the company president. After dinner, the group returns to the classroom for a more informal period that can stretch late into the evening.

The second morning begins with actual demonstrations using the system with real subjects. Lunch is again provided on the train, and the afternoon is mostly spent with attendees photographing each other or a general subject. The class officially ends at 5 pm on the second day, but usually a number of attendees stay around longer, asking many questions.

The 2006 Workshop schedule will be expanded to a third day. We plan to bring in successful photographers who are currently using Virtual Backgrounds to enlighten the group with their particular marketing and man-

agement techniques. They will share personal experiences as well as secrets and tricks of the trade that makes them successful.

The class is definitely not a sales presentation. While some people do take products home with them, the class purpose is educational. The majority of the attendees already own their equipment.

The price for the class is \$450, but it is free to those who have purchased a system from Virtual Backgrounds. For those who have yet to own a system, one can attend the class by paying the tuition with the option of getting a full refund if they purchase a system within thirty days.

Attendees receive a group photograph, a certificate, and an abundance of knowledge making them ready to tackle the world of Virtual Back-



grounds. In the days and months after the workshop, unlimited consultation with Virtual Backgrounds customer support is provided free of charge!

Many attendees report that they consider the workshop to be one of the very best they have ever attended.

In the future, the plan is to offer attendees the opportunity to stay on board the company's two refurbished historic Pullman sleeping train cars.

At this time, workshops are held monthly, however, with the increasing popularity of the Virtual Backgrounds process, some months may have multiple workshops.

Contact Jim Wilson at jim@virtualbackgrounds.net to reserve space in an upcoming workshop.

New VB Product Variable Light Gobo

Virtual Backgrounds introduces a new product designed to help all photographers with a sophisticated control of lighting, whether or not they use the VB process. The new **Variable Light Gobo (VLG)**. It is the perfect way to precisely control the amount of light that falls on a subject and then trails off, exactly as you wish.

The VLG consists of a special holder that attaches to an ordinary light stand. The photographer simply applies any of a variety of light control scrims, using Velcro attachments, to control precisely the fall off of light. The VLG system is far more effective than barn doors or louvers which simply shadow the light.

Variable Light Gobos are available in two sizes: 24" x 16" and 32" x 18" and are sold individually or as complete kits.



New Props Made Especially for Virtual Backgrounds

The two leading prop and polystyrene background makers are now manufacturing special items just for Virtual Backgrounds users. They are specifically designed to complement projected backgrounds. In cooperation with Scenic Design and Off The Wall, Virtual Backgrounds is helping to develop a special series of props and sets specifically designed for use with Virtual Backgrounds to create highly realistic scenes, mostly outdoor settings, for use in the studio 24/7.

Until now, many props were not quite right for use with Virtual Backgrounds. If one purchased an entire set, the cost was high and there may

have been no place to incorporate the Virtual Backgrounds component. On the other hand, bits and pieces of the sets could be incorporated. Component packages are now available that are perfect for use in harmonious conjunction with Virtual Backgrounds. The props are designed to be perfect in the foreground or just behind the subject with the ultimate background being projected.

The first new prop comes from Scenic Design and it is based on an actual setting used by Georgia photographer, Susie Butler. An image made by Susie appears in the new book *Background Power!* by Henry

Oles (pg. 8-15). That image, taken in a real garden, became the basis for this new prop available exclusively from Virtual Backgrounds.

Off The Wall has also created a new garden gate with an ornate wrought iron look. In each case, the photographer using Virtual Backgrounds can utilize an infinite variety of backgrounds with each prop. The prop never gets old because it can always be made to look different.

As the project is almost at it's completion, we will have more information on these fantastic new props...and more...on our web site at www.virtualbackgrounds.net.



Images by Trevon Baker

Introducing Print Competition Winner: Cindy Cofer



Cindy Cofer of Williamstown, Kentucky (population 5,000) started doing photography out of her home just three years ago while raising four kids and working with the school system. Last year, she purchased a house just off main street which was a perfect location for her small town, one person studio.

It was Cindy's deep desire to be more creative that led her to take a special interest in backgrounds. She began to

explore the possibilities and discovered the Virtual Backgrounds concept. Cindy bought the Scene Machine and went right to work, using her Fuji S2 camera. After only a minimal amount of technical assistance, Cindy was off and run-



ning. Her initial experiments were with her daughter, but after just three



days, she shot her first senior. Cindy felt really great when someone at Miller's Professional Labs included a short note with her order. It just said, "Very good."

In addition to seniors, Cindy is now using the Scene Machine for just about everything she does including families, romantic couples, maternity, and kids. Cindy states, "I love it because it's something different...it

lets me be unique and different...it lets me stand out in my area...no one else has it yet. I take images no one else has...I never get bored in the studio and I'm not cramped with big props and other backgrounds."

Although she purchased many stock backgrounds with the system, Cindy is actively creating her own backgrounds. She likes her own backgrounds because they represent her local area and because they are truly hers. Current samples of her work can be seen at www.cindycofercreations.com.



Cindy Cofer

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER

Rick Harding—From Proms to Schools and Much Much More



Harding Studio

No one does proms like Rick Harding. He offers his clients a clearly distinctive product. He works with his clients to customize their backgrounds and they respond with sales.

Rick Harding's father, Fred, started Harding Studio in 1946. As Rick took over the business, he found himself growing tired of fighting for the San Antonio prom business by continually lowering his prices and not having anything really special to offer to ensure that he got the contracts. Frustrated, he decided that he was going to quit doing proms if he could not find a way to sign up the best proms without being the cheapest bidder. He chose to build his prom business around custom created

backgrounds. Initially, he used large cardboard murals as backgrounds. Then he discovered the Virtual Background concept. With Virtual Backgrounds, he could promise the prom committees that his new technology would enable him to create any imaginable background setting to match the theme of their prom. For example, if the theme was "Evening In Paradise," he could produce a choice of spectacular sunsets, complete with a beach, ocean waves and even some palm trees! Whatever their theme, he had a variety of spectacular backgrounds. The plan worked. Rick soon began getting one prime prom after another and eventually

he purchased a total of eight Scene Machine Virtual Background systems to generate the backgrounds for all the proms he was booking. Some of his largest proms required three simultaneous shooting stations. The larger proms could easily generate in excess of \$10,000 in one night. An entire Virtual Background system



"Without my Virtual Background systems, I probably would not be in business today."

ing about having the lowest price. His prom package prices range from \$15 to about \$50. The students listen to his proposal, look at his samples and sign the contracts, enabling him to bring in hundreds of thousands of prom dollars. During some parts of the season, all eight Virtual Background systems are in use. Rick explains, "Prom contracts are never automatic. You have to go after them every year. There are always new students and sometimes new advisors. I do have competitors who try their

best to get the



duced, helping Harding Studio be one of the most successful operations in the ninth largest city in the US. Rick Harding now makes available to other photographers (outside of San Antonio) his custom background slides, promotional materials, and instructional materials. He can be reached through his web site at www.hardingstudio.com.

VB People Spotlight: Maria Batte

Virtual Backgrounds is pleased to announce a new member of the VB family. Maria Batte has just joined the team as a consultant with emphasis on Mexico and other Spanish speaking countries. A native of Linares, Nuevo Leon (Mexico), Maria has lived and traveled extensively though Mexico and neighboring regions including Tampico, Tamaulipas; Celaya, Guanajuato; La Romana, Dominican Republic; and San Pedro Sula, Honduras. She has lived in nearby Wimberley, Texas for just under two years. Maria will be a huge asset to the company and we are very pleased that she has come on board the Virtual Backgrounds express!

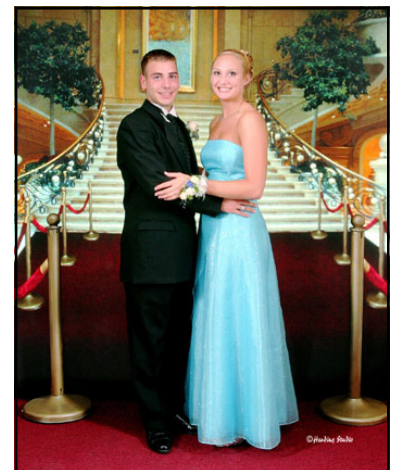
Maria can be reached at maria@virtualbackgrounds.net.



would be more than paid for in one single night! Now, years later, he continues to get his choice of the best proms in the area without worry-

contracts, but if I can get the students to let me make my proposal, Harding Studio usually gets the contract." Rick is continually upgrading his methods. The students get to not only help choose the background, but they can even get intimately involved in the creation of the background in that Rick now uses Photoshop to create backgrounds that don't even exist. For example, he can combine many different elements into a background, taking into consideration student suggestions. While it sounds like a lot of work, Rick reports that most of his custom prom backgrounds take between thirty minutes and an hour to create on his computer. The students love to have input and Harding Studio likes the rewards.

At the same time, Rick is making his life a little easier by inserting some of his props into his background slide rather than having to bring the props to the affair. Proms are definitely not the only thing the studio does. Harding Studio is one of the largest senior and school photographers in San Antonio. Virtual Backgrounds is involved in 90% of the work pro-



Upcoming Schools & Conventions

Are you interested in seeing the Virtual Backgrounds system up close and personal but can't come to San Marcos to attend a workshop? Check us out at one of the below events. Chances are we'll be coming to a town near you!

Texas PPA Fall Convention

October 16-17, 2005
(San Antonio, Texas)

Colorado PPA Fall Convention

October 15-17, 2005
(Denver, Colorado)

Triangle Fall Convention

October 23-25, 2005
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

Business Class with Attitude!

January 3-5, 2006
(Denver, Colorado)

Business Class with Attitude!

January 15-17, 2006
(Richmond, Virginia)

PPA National Convention

January 22-24, 2006
(Austin, Texas)

Business Class with Attitude!

February 13-15, 2006
(San Francisco, California)

Business Class with Attitude!

February 20-22, 2006
(San Marcos, Texas)

PMA Convention & Trade Show

February 26-March 1, 2006
(Orlando, Florida)

Mid-East States Convention

March 1-6, 2006
(Dayton, Ohio)

PP of North Carolina Convention

March 3-8, 2006
(Raleigh, North Carolina)

Children & Family Photo. Conv.

March 5-7, 2006
(Austin, Texas)

Simone Class w/ Michael Koska

March 7-10, 2006
(Columbia, South Carolina)

Business Class with Attitude!

March 13-15, 2006
(Boston, Massachusetts)

SW PPA Convention

March 18-22, 2006
(Arlington, Texas)

Triangle School w/ Trevon Baker

March 26-31, 2006
(Greentree, Pennsylvania)

WPPI Convention & Trade Show

April 7-11, 2006
(Las Vegas, Nevada)

The Business Class With Attitude!

Virtual Backgrounds is pleased to announce that we will host a **Business Class With Attitude!** marketing workshop this February 2006. This 3-day event will be held at our facility in San Marcos, Texas on February 20-21-22, 2006. This workshop will feature cutting edge business sales and marketing information, guaranteed to help grow your business!

Other dates for this workshop tour include Denver, Co. January 3-4-5, Richmond, Va. January 15-17-18, San Francisco, Ca. February 13-14-15, and Boston, Ma. March 13-14-15.

The facilitator for this workshop is Greg Stangl, M. Photog., Cr., CPP.

Greg has been a professional photographer for 35 years and has lectured in 35 US states and 7 foreign countries. He brings decades of experience in photography to this workshop. Greg has a proven track record of motivating individuals and studios to higher levels of growth and profit.

The registration fee for this 3-day business, sales and marketing workshop is \$495 per person which includes a 150 page workbook and all seminar materials. **When you call to register and mention Virtual Backgrounds, you will automatically receive \$50 off of your registration fee.** Sponsors for the workshop



include Buckeye Color Lab, the TAP company, Marathon Press and Virtual Backgrounds.

For more information or to register for this workshop, call Greg Stangl at the Village Photographer at 630-896-3542. More information about Greg can be seen at his website at www.prospeak1.com.

We highly recommend this workshop for any photographer seriously interested in growing their business.



A new flash unit is available for photographers who need a flash that is equally useful at home in the studio as it is on location, far from any power source. The AC/DC Combo Flash is the perfect tool for the busy professional photographer who needs a single flash that is useful both indoors and outdoors.

In the studio, the Combo Flash works

NEW COMBO FLASH - Plug in for the Studio and Battery for Location Work

like any other studio flash. It is available in both 160 watt seconds and 320 watt seconds and can be mated with almost any reflector, soft box or umbrella. But, when the photographer needs a powerful flash on location, where no power is available, the inexpensive accessory rechargeable battery pack goes to work.

A key feature of this battery pack is that not only is it inexpensive but just as important is that the rechargeable batteries are replaceable in just a few seconds and are only \$29.95.

For a big job, the photographer can pre-charge several batteries.

Compare this unit against it's competition; it sells for just a fraction of the price.

The Combo Flash is available from [Web Photo Supply](http://WebPhotoSupply.com), a Virtual Backgrounds sister company. Further information can be found online by clicking [here](#).



Did You Know? When financing a Virtual Backgrounds system, you can deduct THOUSAND\$ from your 2005 tax return!

Get a Virtual Backgrounds system for almost nothing down and let the IRS pay for a significant part of it!

Under **IRS Section 179***, equipment purchases up to \$100,000 can be expensed (deducted from taxable income) if installed by December 31st. Finance leases (\$1.00 buyout option) qualify for this deduction in their year of inception. It's a fantastic program to help small businesses grow.

Bob Bell, President of Independent Leasing Associates, is recognized as the recommended leasing company by the Professional Photographers of

America (PPA). Bob states, "This plan makes it possible for just about anyone to acquire a Virtual Backgrounds system and start using it to grow their business and expand profit opportunities. Cost is no longer a hindrance! Under IRS rules, this is like getting a huge discount from the government."

As an example, if you finance a \$7,000 Virtual Backgrounds system and install it in 2005, you are eligible to deduct the full \$7,000 from your 2005 tax return.

Furthermore, using the "Deferred Payment" option, the down payment on a \$7,000 system can be as low as \$500

and payments for the first three months would be only \$50 per month!

This is an opportunity that you can't afford to miss out on! Contact Virtual Backgrounds for further details.

ACT NOW!

Take advantage of this government bonus to help small business!

*Consult with your tax advisor for specific information regarding IRS Section 179 and all accounting procedures.



BACKGROUND POWER!

BACKGROUND POWER!

How to Enhance Your Creativity and Increase Profits with Background Technology



New 220 Page, Full Color, Hard Cover Book

"An outstanding read - it details why and how backgrounds in photographs can have such a powerful impact on the finished images and the photographer's clients."

William Gebhardt
Bend, Oregon

"Any photographer young and old interested in producing fine portraiture should consider making their first purchase a Virtual Backgrounds system."

James Morgan, Photo Images by James
Honesdale, Pennsylvania

"This book excited me - I can't wait to get my (Virtual Backgrounds) system. Virtual Backgrounds is awesome!"

Chris Andrade, Visual Imaging Photography
El Paso, Texas

"...Good reading!..., written from the uncontested guru of background savvy. Here's a man who knows his stuff."

Dave Newman
Salt Lake City, Utah

"Background Power! is a wonderful book. It offers enough solid, practical information to provide a novice or seasoned pro with a realistic perspective on the realities of running a professional studio in today's ever-changing and certainly challenging market. It should rank at the top among the bibles for studio operation."

John Owen, Great Lakes Institute of Photography
Traverse City, Michigan

"Integrating Virtual Backgrounds into our work enabled us to expand our creativity to a world of limitless possibilities. All you need is a little imagination and you will create images beyond any expectation."

Joseph and Louise Simone
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

DISCOVER THE \$\$ POWER IN BACKGROUNDS!

Background Power! is sold with a 100% money back guarantee.

You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Order your copy of **Background Power!** today for only \$39.95.

*NEW FINANCING PLAN

- Get a complete Virtual Backgrounds system for \$500 down
- The first 3 monthly payments are only \$50 per month
- **ADDED BONUS:** Deduct the full amount from your 2005 tax return if purchased and installed before 12/31/05. This is an IRS bonus that you should not miss!

Contact Virtual Backgrounds for More Details!

*Calculations based on credit approval for a \$7,000 new system. This lease-to-own financing plan is a 39-month Deferred Payment Lease with a \$1.00 buyout.



Independent Leasing
ASSOCIATES

PPA Recommended Leasing Company