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New kids' series 'Pikwik Pack' puts spotlight on deliveries

By MARK KENNEDY yesterday



NEW YORK (AP) — The studio behind the kids' mega-hit TV show "Paw Patrol" has a new animated series that arrives timed perfectly for a global pandemic: It celebrates delivery people.

"Pikwik Pack," which airs on Disney Junior and DisneyNOW, stars four animal friends working together to deliver packages in their community. In the real world, postal workers and delivery drivers are being cheered as essential workers.

“We’re launching the show at a time that we feel the world actually would really appreciate this,” said Frank Falcone, president and executive creative director of Guru Studio, which produced the series.

“Even when we were developing it, four years ago, we couldn’t possibly have imagined that we’d be in our homes really counting on a doorbell ringing and something arriving,” said Falcone.

The preschool series features Suki the hedgehog, Axel the raccoon, Tibor the hippo and Hazel the cat. They each have a favorite mode of transportation — train, helicopter, truck and boat.

Every 12-minute episode is a quest to hand-deliver a package: A space-obsessed child gets a telescope, a blueberry farmer tired of his fruit gets an apple tree and a milkshake shop gets a much-needed blender. Each time the deliverers sing: “Together we travel, by land, sea and air, to bring you this package, delivered with care.”

“Everything that the characters deliver in the show are always meant to bring people together. They’re not items that you use for yourself. They’re items that can help you bring together the people in your community,” said Falcone. “We’re not encouraging selfishness. We’re encouraging sharing. Deliveries are a good way to bring a community together.”

Rachel Marcus, vice president of creative development at Guru Studio, said the show and its four critters stay true to the studio’s character-driven focus.

“Each has a flaw and each has a strength,” she said. “Everyone can utilize their strengths and help each other with their flaws and moments where they need to grow and learn.”

In one episode, Axel takes on the task of delivering a package on his own but gets stuck and wastes time. “It’s OK to do things all by yourself. But it’s also OK to ask your friends for help,” Suki tells him gently. In another, Tibor overcomes his fear of water thanks to his supportive friends.

Falcone and Marcus said one big artistic influence on the making of the show was Richard Scarry, who used small critters to examine the human-made world of tools, vehicles, jobs and communities.

“They show diversity in having different species living together. It’s a really great metaphor for kids to see different animals living in a community together,” said Falcone.

When a package magically appears at the beginning of each episode, the Pikwik Pack consult a map and figure out the best way to cross town to deliver the package. They also learn to be flexible.

“You can have a plan, but the best-laid plans, as we all know, they never work out. So you always have to have the critical thinking skills ready, and you have to be agile and adapt to changing situations,” Falcone said. “That creates more interesting stories and it helps kids understand that sometimes things don’t go exactly as planned.”

Another interesting thing about the series is that the pack is led by Suki, who is a little more quiet than most cartoon leaders. That was purposeful.

“I think you can be a leader, whether you’re a boy or a girl, and be quiet and be a leader that people go to for answers rather than someone who tells you what to do,” Falcone said.

The show’s creators hope children will guess what the package is, enjoy the unboxing reveal at the mission’s end and tap into the joy that children get while giving.

“We all know kids love getting things. They love their birthdays, they love Christmas. But I think giving is also equally important — the joy of seeing what that brings to the person who is receiving it,” Falcone said.

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By JAN M. OLSEN today



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