

CARRYING HIS WEIGHT

Will Smith aims to give back

WORDS PAUL SALFEN

PHOTO JONATHAN ZIZZO

Will Smith is the biggest movie star in the world. According to box office receipts, he has the highest number of consecutive \$100 million films—eight—and there will likely be more to follow. In addition to that, Smith has had an incredibly successful TV and music career. So it's no surprise that when Smith, 40, made a public appearance at Cinemark 17 in Dallas last month, the place was a zoo.

The notoriously charitable star has been doing a whirlwind tour, not only promoting his new film, *Seven Pounds*, but also donating food—in this case, 300 turkeys to the North Texas Food Bank—and raising awareness about the desperate situation many Americans face during these challenging times.

“I’ve made a decision that I don’t want to do anything or be a part of anything that doesn’t make some else’s life better,” he says. “That’s the question I ask myself: ‘It might be cool, it might make money, it might look hot, but what is the value that it has to people?’ I want to be a part of something that means something.”

Smith asked of the crowd, “Make someone’s life better. There are people that need your help right now. It doesn’t have to be a big thing—somebody locked their keys in the car, somebody needs to use your cell phone. Help them. It’s a beautiful thing.”

The notable turnout, including major media outlets and hundreds of fans who waited all day to catch a glimpse of Smith, counted in its numbers megapastor and author T.D. Jakes, Dallas Stars’ Marty Turco and Brendan Morrow, Texas Rangers’ Travis Metcalfe and radio host Tom Joyner, who all caught *Seven Pounds* before the media was allowed to see it.

The film’s plot has been kept under wraps, and Smith explains to *ENVY* the reason for the secrecy: “That’s part of the way the film works. You can’t say anything about it, because it reveals itself, not like a mystery, but part of the movie. You’re trying to figure it out while it goes along. It’s about a guy, Ben Thomas, and he experiences a real tragedy, and he’s trying to find a way to make these seven peoples’ lives better. The story evolves as he finds that change.”

The film is directed by Gabrielle Muccino, who also helmed the downer-upper-downer *The Pursuit of Happyness*, which garnered Smith his second Best Actor Oscar nod. Smith hopes the fans take to the story, even with the sad theme, and realizes it may not be for everyone. He says, “I hope everyone enjoys it, and even if they don’t enjoy it, I hope it makes them think.”

Along the theme of the film and appearance, he explains, “It’s really easy to make someone’s life worse. I could make your life worse right now really easily, but it’s actually difficult to figure out what I could do to make your life better and that, to me, is a simple idea—but it’s not easy.”

Giving back has always been a key goal for Smith. He cites his grandmother as his key influence in that respect, as she was a big part of the movement at Resurrection Baptist Church in Philadelphia. He explains, “She was really serious about



doing her part, and I’m trying to build that idea in the bigger groups that I’m involved with as a citizen of the world.”

He continues, “I just think that everybody has to do their part. I think when groups build a civilization, you have a policeman, a doctor—part of the commitment that those people make is to do their part to the best of their ability, so if your house catches on fire, and the firemen don’t put the fire out fast that destroys your civilization, and we all have our

individual parts that we have to do to the best of our ability.”

In the end, Smith hopes to have not only made his grandmother proud, but to feel no doubt that he did the best he could to make the world a better place, which is not often seriously undertaken in Hollywood. He says with pride, “When I’m done 40 years from now—maybe 60, since medicine is advancing—I want to be number one on the list of people that helped people—at least top ten!”