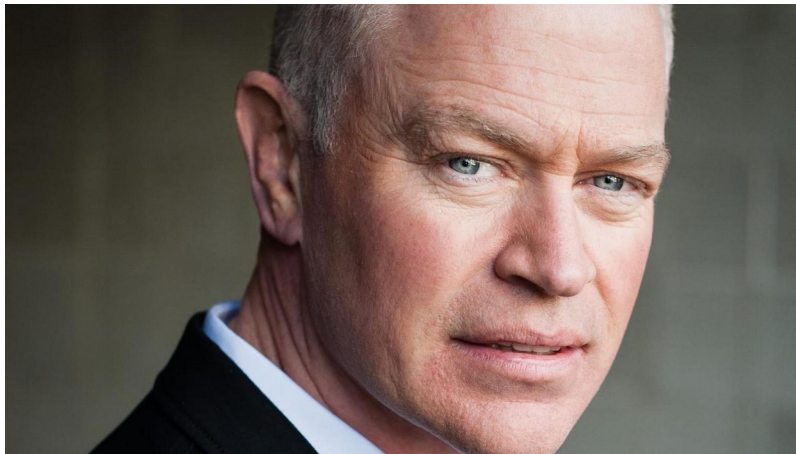


E X C L U S I V E I N T E R V I E W

## Neal McDonough Lights a Cigar with Stallone and Becomes the Governor of Tulsa King

*The Band of Brothers and Yellowstone veteran opens up about faith, family, the Super Bowl of acting, and why every character—even the tree in second grade—thinks he’s the hero.*

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine



Neal McDonough. Photo courtesy of the subject / public appearance.

As *Tulsa King* Season 4 arrives on Paramount+ on October 16, Neal McDonough’s Cal Thresher has traded the marijuana grow for the governor’s mansion. The territorial Oklahoma businessman who clashed with Sylvester Stallone’s Dwight Manfredi in Season 2, then ran for office in Season 3, now sits as the state’s newly elected governor—still convinced he is the most important man in every room.

### CIGARS, STRAIGHT SHOOTERS, AND THE SUPER BOWL OF SETS

Salfen noted the juicy role. McDonough smiled. “It’s fun when you get to hang out with Sylvester Stallone every day,” he said. “There are a few guys in this business who are such a straight shooter, tells you exactly how he feels, but comes to work so prepared. The guy’s 80 years old and is in better shape than all of us, and he’s so prepared to win in everything that he does and it’s infectious. So to be part of *Tulsa King* for the last couple of years has just been a real treat and a blessing for me.”

The memory that still lands is from roughly two years earlier, outside the pot farm set in Georgia. It was sweltering. A twenty-minute break opened. Stallone asked if McDonough smoked cigars. He did. They sat and talked about life, family, and their Catholic roots. “That became like our thing on set after a while,” McDonough said. “I look back on those days very, very fondly. I’m a big fan of Sly and he’s just a heck of a guy.”

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McDonough tested the relationship early. On the first shot of a scene, with his wife Ruvé watching from video village, he began imitating Stallone. She worried he would be fired. Stallone rounded the corner red-faced, then said, “You got some set of bull’s on you,” and gave her a hug. “He enjoys people who come prepared for the Super Bowl,” McDonough said. “That’s kind of how I always conduct myself on set. I’m there to win every time and do the best that I can for the team.”

## THE HAIL MARY MOMENT

Salfen’s co-host that day was Drew Pearson, the Cowboys Hall of Famer who caught the Hail Mary. McDonough remembered the catch. When Salfen asked for McDonough’s own Hail Mary—the moment he had to throw and make it work—McDonough did not hesitate. “The day I met my wife,” he said. “She was way out of my league. She still is. And now five kids, 26 years of being together, almost 27, 15 movies we’ve produced together. She’s my manager. She’s the love of my life. So that was my Hail Mary. I still don’t understand how I nabbed that one.”

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## GOD FIRST, FAMILY FIRST

Salfen asked what advice McDonough would give someone who wants to enter the business the right way. It took years to figure out, McDonough said. Early on he was working but not cranking. Then came the decision, around Band of Brothers, to stop darkening his hair and simply be himself. “If you’re true to yourself as an artist and you work really, really, really hard and don’t care so much about what everyone else thinks—all you really care about is what you think as the artist and what God thinks of your choices—those are the two things that really drive me. And I’m fortunate that I have someone in my corner like my wife, Ruvé, who allows me to have that thought process and keep hitting the tackling sled as hard as I can.”

What keeps him on the path is simple. “It’s my faith. It’s God first, me second, family first, me second. I love my job, I love acting, I love writing, I love producing, I love all this stuff. But it’s way back behind how much I love God and my family. To be a guy who really gets to make movies about the great United States of America and a lot of the heartfelt films that we’ve been producing that really glorify not just America but Him at the same time—I’m the luckiest guy I know.”

## I AM THE HERO

Cal Thresher is a different animal from many of McDonough’s previous roles, yet the preparation is the same. “I’m the hero,” he said. “That’s all I think. Whether I’m a good guy or a bad guy, I always think I’m the hero of the piece. It’s not just an ego thing for me. It’s for the character really to pop off the screen. The character has to think that he’s the most important person in the scene. And by doing so, if he’s the villain, it’s really scary. But if he’s a hero, it becomes really emotional and heartfelt. So every character I play, I think he’s the hero.”

The habit started early. “Even when I was in second grade, Mrs. Butler’s class, where I was cast as the tree. I thought I was the star of the show. I had no lines, but I’m telling you, I was up there. I posed. I was holding that tree forever. It just kind of always been in my brain to be the best that I can be. And I’m lucky that I had great parents and a great family around me.”

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## TAYLOR SHERIDAN AND THE PLUM ROLES

What McDonough is glad to be part of is the larger Sheridan universe. “Taylor Sheridan has been so darn good to me. Yellowstone was such a blast to work with Kevin, whom I’ve been friends with for a long time, ever since The Guardian. We’d take batting practice at LSU every day and just hit baseballs and talk about life. And then to work with the guy who literally I think was the reason I became an actor when I saw Rocky when I was nine years old—this chunky little kid trying to do one-handed push-ups—I said, I want to be like this guy. And to actually be on camera with both those guys... I know a ton of gratitude to Taylor Sheridan, and he keeps giving me these plum roles. There has never been a guy in Hollywood as prolific as a writer in such a short amount of time as Taylor Sheridan.”

## WHAT’S NEXT, AND TEXAS BOUND

McDonough is never idle. “We have Angel and the Badman coming out October 8th, which I can’t wait. Zach Levi and Tommy Lee Jones and myself. That’s going to be a great film for Angel Studios. And then we have the Jimmy Stewart story that I also produced. K.J. Apa is unbelievable as Jimmy Stewart. And we’re heading up to Poland for this great Polish Catholic film that I’m doing. And then Rapture that we started with another film with my favorite director of all time, Jon Avnet, for A New York Minute. And we’ll be doing that in Texas in November. So very busy. Ruvé and I just keep on producing things, and we’re so blessed to be able to do it together.”

The Texas work is personal. McDonough told Salfen the family has purchased property in the state and will be moving before long. He was already wearing the Texas belt buckle and boots. They will see each other at the Fort Worth Film Festival for the Jimmy Stewart project. “I love Texas,” he said.

Finally, the pitch for the show that brought them together. “I guarantee you this season on Tulsa King is, after getting through the Dunmire, you think that’s as bad as it gets? No. Corrupt politicians, gangs, everything. Everyone’s up against it alone. And you know, Dwight’s the guy who can get the job done. And for goodness sakes, give Sylvester Stallone an Academy, a Golden Globe or an Emmy or something, because that man deserves it more than anybody.”

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## FIND NEAL MCDONOUGH

Tulsa King Season 4 premieres October 16, 2026, on Paramount+. Previous seasons streaming now.

Angel and the Badman in theaters from Angel Studios.

Instagram: @neal\_mcdonough

McDonough Company productions ongoing.

*Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine, October 2026.*

*Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.*