

Queensbridge Movie Includes Rap Notables

Written by Robert ID1176

Wednesday, 13 April 2005 09:59 -

In recent years, the massive Queensbridge housing project in Long Island City has been getting a bad rap, and filmmaker Selena Blake wants to set the record straight in her documentary about the city-run development.

The Jamaica-born filmmaker has a short wish list for the video project, which includes the \$200,000 needed to finish the work.

When completed in 1939, the Queensbridge Houses gained instant notoriety because of its sprawling size and role as a showcase for affordable public housing in the U.S.

A host of notables have called the project home. And Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia would regularly visit when his sister lived there. But Blake noted that the complex also has been the birthplace of hopes and dreams for thousands of its not-so-famous residents.

"When I first moved to Queensbridge, I hated it," said Blake, whose family moved from an East Elmhurst house to the housing project and apartment living. But over the years, she grew to appreciate the place, its past, its people and its possibilities.

"My whole passion for doing this is for the young folks to realize what they have. There are so many amazing stories," said the model-actress, who has been working 12- to 16-hour days and extra jobs to help pay for the project.

Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan (D-Queens), hip-hop rap star Nas, NBA player / rap artist Ron Artest, state Supreme Court Justice Carol Robinson Edmead, actor Mel Johnson and Mark Samowitz of Broadway Stages sound stage are among the Queensbridge notables in the movie.

But the documentary also highlights subjects such as Dirty, a once-homeless man who became a respected funeral director, and a 20-year-old Queensbridge resident who lost his job when he took time off to donate a kidney to his mother.

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Since starting last year, Blake has amassed \$30,000 in credit-card debt and loans, but has collected nearly 40 hours of interviews and footage for the documentary, which will be produced in high-tech, high-definition format.

She's getting technical support from Queens-born Gregory Larkin, a producer and director at the Broadway Stages facility.

But her devotion to the Queensbridge residents - especially the young people who live there - is keeping her inspired despite the financial hardships.

"You've got to help in your backyard," she explained. "I feel God has given me a job. It's something I have to do - help the people of Queensbridge."

For information on the documentary project, call (718) 472-1553 or send E-mail to maynovproductions@msn.com

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