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ENTERTAINMENT

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UPPER SADDLE RIVER

A rock-star red-carpet rollout

Locally-based film company produces riveting documentary

BY KARL DE VRIES
OF TOWN JOURNAL

It was a night befitting the red carpet – even if no one mistook Paramus for Hollywood.

“Harry: A Communication Breakdown,” a documentary detailing the murder of a Montvale family, premiered at Chakra Restaurant last week. Produced by Upper Saddle River-based Starline Films, the story centers on 18-year-old Harry De La Roche Jr., a loner who shot both his parents and two brothers over Thanksgiving weekend in 1976.

Among those attending the premier were Terrence Howard, who is starring in another upcoming Starline picture titled “4Chosen,” and Saddle River resident Danny Aiello, who narrated the documentary.

“Harry” is a companion piece to the feature film “Anyone’s Son,” which is scheduled for a late 2009 release by Starline. Jon Doscher, who produced and directed “Harry” along with Fran Ganguzza, will portray De La Roche in the dramatic rendition.

“We are faced with the reality that violence can exist anywhere, in any town,” Aiello told the packed dining room at the chic restaurant prior to the screening. He served as executive producer of the documentary and also will

direct “Anyone’s Son.”

Proceeds from the screening benefited the New Jersey chapter of the Child Assault Project (NJCAP), an international organization aimed at protecting children from physical, emotional and sexual abuse. In “Harry,” the producers suggest that a repressed home environment and beatings from his father prompted De La Roche to violently react.

“Children are vulnerable because they’re powerless, they’re isolated and they lack knowledge,” said Debbie Tedino, a Bergen County coordinator for NJCAP. The project, funded through a state grant, facilitates over 60 workshops each year in Bergen County school districts, offering advice and warnings to K-12 students. “[Abuse] is not a rite of passage. We’re molding the lives of children, and they’re the future,” Tedino said. “We want them to be free of harm and hurt.”

Meanwhile, the stature of Starline Films has grown steadily since its founding in 2004 by Doscher. The combined budgets of “4Chosen” and “Anyone’s Son” approach \$30 million, and A-list actors Sharon Stone, Val Kilmer and Robert Duvall are slated to appear in “Anyone’s Son.”

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CHRIS PETERS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Movie star Terrence Howard and his son join Jon Doscher, founder of the Upper Saddle River-based Starline Films, on the red carpet in Paramus.

Q&A with Jon Doscher, founder of U. Saddle River-based film company, Starline Films

BY KARL DE VRIES
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Life’s been good to Jon Doscher lately. Having just completed two documentaries in support of his upcoming feature film projects, the Woodcliff Lake native and actor and producer for the Upper Saddle River-based Starline Films, speaks with *Town Journal* about the case of Harry De La Roche Jr., growing up in Bergen County and the grind of working in the movie business.

Q: What attracted you to the story?

A: I wanted to diversify. I was working on “4Chosen” mainly, and that’s not really the way to go; you’re less vulnerable if you’re working on multiple projects. So while searching for a premise and story, I realized I had a great one right here in town.

Q: What makes the story great?

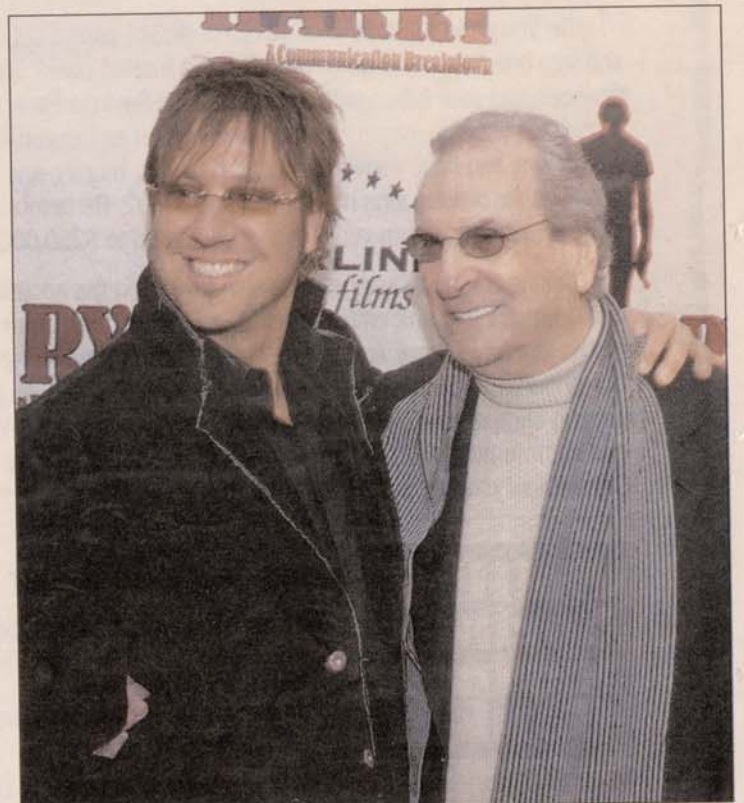
A: When I asked around, it seemed as if it had a very strong, horrific impact on many of the residents, and that was intriguing, because they weren’t even

open to discuss it. I think the reason that it impacted Montvale the way it did was because it was a Thanksgiving weekend and it had a very nice, warm, fuzzy feeling to it. When Harry eventually collapsed and had his meltdown and killed his family, it just terrified people.

Q: Despite having been convicted of all four murders, Harry De La Roche Jr. claims that he murdered only his brother Ronald and accused him of the other deaths. Do you believe him?

A: Some days I do. He’s very convincing, and his story is not completely unreasonable. I believe, at least today, that he reached a point and was operating in a psychotic state of mind. I think he snapped. When he realized that he committed the murders, I think he began to condition his mind into believing it was his brother Ronald who killed his family and that’s why he hid the body. That was the first story: ‘I came home, my whole family is dead and my middle brother Ron is gone.’

Q: The murders took place 32 years ago. Why do



Jon Doscher, producer and director of the documentary, “Harry,” is joined by Saddle River resident Danny Aiello.

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you think the story is still relevant today?

A: Because it is. The epidemic of patricide and matricide, the act of killing parents, is prominent. The statistic has remained steady over the years. That's fascinating when you consider how much the world has changed over three decades and that it's still happening. Even considering there's more counseling and medication now, and children are looked after more closely. It's usually within middle-class Caucasian males a little over 18 and

families that are seemingly functional.

Q: *Why do you think it's prominently middle class?*

A: That world, that style of living, is fictional at times. Families encourage their kids to go on and either go to med school or whatever they're encouraging their child to do, but that's not necessarily what the child wants. But the child may want to satisfy and have the approval of their parents. So I think it's up to the parents to understand their child and know if, in fact, the child is doing the right thing for them and coach them and guide them rather than steer them in a direction.

Q: *But isn't encouragement a positive thing for kids?*

A: Michael Phelps is a good example. He also, like Harry, was sort of an introvert, sort of a gawky outcast who didn't fit in and wasn't popular and was picked on. But then he found swimming, and swimming was his outlet. So his mother drove him, and compromised her life for her son to pursue his goal, and look at what he went on and did. So it can always be a positive thing as long as it's what the child wants. But in this case, Harry De La Rouche Sr., instilling the use of guns, the military code and lifestyle, forced Harry Jr. to go to the Citadel because he wanted that for Harry. But then once he

did give in, and attend the Citadel, the hazing and the abuse was really the final point for him to reach prior to collapsing.

Q: *You're a northern New Jersey guy. How did growing up in the area shape your vision of the project?*

A: Woodcliff Lake was an extraordinary town to grow up in. I think the upside of Bergen County is that it's so close to New York and it's so close to the Jersey shore, yet it's expensive, so it has a certain taste of living here that requires a certain work ethic in order to survive: hard work, perseverance, competition. I think that Bergen County is a breeding ground, particularly for the motion picture business; I really believe that. It has that fine blend and balance of a conventional, sound upbringing with solid-ground ties. However, it also represents an upper-middle-class demand of execution. It has a sense of competition here, which I think is a good thing. What you don't want that to become, however, are envy and jealousy, and fortunately for me, one of the things that has kept me going is that I don't get jealous or envious of people.

Q: *Tell me about Starline Films.*

A: Starline Films I created myself in June 2004. There are three ingredients to Starline Films: Kevin Leckner, Fran Ganguzza and myself. The reason why Starline Films is effective, and when I say effective, I mean we progress. We actually improve each day. I remember my football coach at Pascack Hills, he said to us, "if you don't improve each day, you get worse." And I used to think about that when I was 17: if you stay the same, you're regressing. We're not the best individuals at what we do yet, and I think we will become that one day, but we're the best

team that I know of. I compare Starline to the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team. They weren't the best players on the ice, but they were the best team on the ice.

Q: *Why make both documentaries and feature films on your subjects?*

A: I always saw the documentaries as a safety net for me, just in case I couldn't get the feature films financed, cast and made. In other words, it kind of hedged my bet a little bit. That was the conservative approach. The optimistic approach was, "hey, while I'm making the features I'm going to make the docs, and then the docs are going to help promote the feature films, and when the feature films come out, the documentaries will get their own life and it's a win-win for both films." That's the assertive, aggressive businessman in me. I must say, it turned out in my favor for the optimistic side.

Q: *You must feel very gratified.*

A: Trust me, it's been a volatile roller coaster of brutal, grueling rejections and disappointments. And that's what the motion picture business is, and that's why the Starline team was able to pull through together. Because it's a debilitating process of "no, no, no, maybe, no, maybe, no." But now we're at the point where, guess what? We finished the docs, now I got two feature films funded with 30 million bucks, I got Terrence Howard starring in "4Chosen" that I'm playing opposite of. In "Anyone's Son," I'm playing the lead, with actors like Sharon Stone and Val Kilmer and Robert Duvall. So as tough as it's been, for whatever reasons, I've been given the opportunities to actually make it happen.

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