

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Posted on Tue, Feb. 06, 2007

Film on driving under the influence mirrors reality TV

DANVILLE: Pack Foundation project uses 'Laguna Beach' model to emphasize point about responsible driving

By Jeanine Benca
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Say what you want about reality television -- it sells.

Producers of an up-and-coming teen "mockumentary" about the consequences of drinking and driving had that thought in mind when they began planning their script.

"What we came up with was 'Laguna Beach' meets 'The Blair Witch Project,'" said director Rebecca Brown, a graduate student in the Peter Stark Producing Program at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts in Los Angeles.

The 20-minute film, expected to be completed by late April, will be the first of its kind -- a public service announcement with the look and feel of a reality television show/documentary. Filmmakers hope to trick young viewers into thinking the teenage characters being portrayed by actors are real, Brown said.

The film is the latest project of the Troy and Alana Pack Foundation, a private, nonprofit outreach and advocacy group based in Danville. Once the film is finished, any school or community leader who wants a copy will be able to e-mail the foundation and receive a free DVD to show students, Pack Foundation founder Bob Pack said.

The goal is to reach every high school in the country, Pack said.

On Oct. 23, 2003, a driver who had been drinking alcohol and abusing prescription painkillers struck Pack's two children with her car as the children walked with their mother, Carmen Pack, on Camino Tassajara Road in Danville, court records said. The Mercedes driven by Jimena Barreto jumped the curb, hitting Alana Pack, 8, and her brother, Troy, 10.

Alana died on impact; Troy died from injuries later that night at the hospital.

Since the accident, the Packs have successfully lobbied for stricter drinking-and-driving laws in California and have been working with state legislators on a plan to develop a real-time prescription drug monitoring system.

The film diverges from the Troy and Alana Pack Foundation's previous projects, but is still in keeping with its overall mission "to help save lives in some manner related to drugs and alcohol," Bob Pack said.

The Troy and Alana Pack Foundation has donated \$50,000 so far for the film, which is being produced by graduate students at the USC. It is expected to cost about \$100,000 altogether to complete. The foundation is soliciting corporate and individual donations to help underwrite the remaining \$50,000 in production costs.

Pack, a USC graduate, said he got the idea for a reality-based film more than a year ago while speaking at several "Every 15 Minute" events. That emotionally-charged program, organized by the California Highway Patrol, aims to reduce teen drinking by staging realistic-looking drunk-driving accidents, faux funerals for "victims" and testimonials from grieving family members at schools.

Pack called on his best friend from college, Bill Barnett, a television and movie producer who lives in Los Angeles. Barnett pitched the idea to Brown, who immediately warmed to it. The two worked with Pack to develop a concept and script for the film.

Their planned mockumentary, about three high school students who get into a car accident after drinking, puts a modern spin on the traditional after-school special.

"We want the kids to sort of lose themselves in the characters and their high school antics, like they would an episode of 'Laguna Beach, The Real O.C.," Brown said, referring to MTV's popular reality television show chronicling the lives of

young adults living in Orange County.

To enhance the reality feel, producers are working with MySpace.com to create fake Web sites for each of the film's characters. Shooting will begin in March.

"I remember getting a call from Bob's mom that very next morning (after Troy and Alana's accident). It was the most devastating phone call you can ever imagine," Barnett said.

"We want this film to be as real as possible," he added. "We're hoping it's going to be a great, groundbreaking film for its genre."

To donate to the project or for more information on the Troy and Alana Pack Foundation, visit www.troyandalana.org. Jeanine Benca covers Danville and Alamo. Reach her at jbenca@cctimes.com or 925-847-2125.

© 2007 ContraCostaTimes.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.contracostatimes.com>