

# De Anza, films make it to Cinequest film festival

## Lynbrook grad among the five filmmakers selected

By ALLISON ROST

Aspiring filmmakers know that institutions like the University of Southern California and New York University are hotbeds of developing cinematic talent. But as the opening of the 2004 Cinequest Film Festival in San Jose shows, De Anza College has also got some movie-making game.

Three films produced by De Anza students have been selected for prime festival showings, the only community college films appearing in the competition. Another short film by a De Anza graduate rising in the Hollywood ranks will also be featured.

"We've been called the 'De Anza Graduate School' because the work we produce is on the level of what's coming out of the four-year schools," says Zaki Lisha, the founder of the Film/TV department at De Anza. "People [at Cinequest] will be surprised at the work coming out of De Anza."

Among the films submitted by current students are two that will compete in the student shorts competition taking place on March 6 and 8. *A Hollywood Story*, a comedy spoofing classic Hollywood films, was produced by Mislav Zelle and Manisha Singh. The other is titled *Behind Blue Eyes*, a documentary by Ricardo Gonzalez that follows a San Francisco panhandler.

"He's the guy that you see all over the place. I've always wondered about his story," Gonzalez explains. "We go into his life and sit with him while he panhandles." The film details the man's experiences in Vietnam and with detox, but Gonzalez says he made sure to end on a hopeful note.

He can sympathize with the man's path. After a rough youth, Gonzalez, now 42, enrolled at De Anza and found inspiration in his documentary class. He premiered *Behind Blue Eyes* at De Anza last June, and Cinequest is his first festival. "I bounced out of my chair when I found out [about Cinequest]," he says. "I'm doing now

• Film, page 9



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## Film: Movie opens Hollywood doors

Continued from page 1

what I should have done, and this was the first piece I did on my own."

Gonzalez works as a videographer at the Media Center in Palo Alto, where he got his job by passing a tape of *Behind Blue Eyes* to a manager there. He has one general education requirement left at De Anza but intends to continue on his current path, working with non-fiction filmmaking.

Another De Anza film at Cinequest is Peter Carter's *Local Time*, which competes in the San Jose shorts program on March 14. Carter, who graduated from Los Gatos High School and Columbia University, enrolled at De Anza to take a number of creative classes. He got the idea for his film early last year while taking Dennis Irwin's sequence on 16mm filmmaking.

*Local Time* profiles a "California suburban cowboy" who hangs out at strip malls. "At one point, he tries to interact with someone else, a young boy, but the boy's mother intervenes, and the cowboy is left by himself, riding his coin-operated horse into the sunset," Carter says.

He anticipates working on a master's in fine arts degree, but Cinequest is his first festival. "I think it's great that there is a community of people in the South Bay that supports emerging filmmakers," Carter says.

Lisha says that was the hope behind the development of the De Anza film department. "In a way, a successful film can stunt your growth. A lot of people think that you start from zero, and then just automatically become a filmmaker. But there's a lot of in between," he says. "We want to train them to be like a detective so they can get that concept, idea or script they were after."

This philosophy greatly benefited Kurt Kuenne, who graduated from De Anza in 1993 before heading to Los Angeles and continuing his education at USC. He's directed a few low-budget features and received a Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science.

However, he's found that his Cinequest entry, *Rent-a-Person*, is opening more Hollywood doors as he's trying to get his next full-length film off the ground. "I've had about four meetings a week," he says. "When you make something short, they actually have the time to watch it and show it around."

*Rent-a-Person* depicts a men's room attendant who rents out homeless people to commuters so they can ride in the carpool lane. He shot what he calls the "romantic musical-comedy" himself, including sequences on the freeway, using skills he first picked up in Mike Holler's lighting class at De Anza. "Before that, I didn't really know what I was doing," he says.

Kuenne, who graduated from Lynbrook High School, returns to his hometown film festival this year for the fifth straight year. While he attended a prestigious film school, he says he's happy that he built his foundation at De Anza. "I was in the honors program at De Anza, and I did all of my general education requirements there," he says. "I'd much rather do that than pay a ton of money for no personal attention at USC." *Rent-a-Person* premieres in the Anything-but-Ordinary shorts category on March 7 and 9.

For more information about the Cinequest Film Festival 2004, visit [www.cinequest.org](http://www.cinequest.org).