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MONTVALE MURDERS

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Local film director looks at all the angles

Documentary accompanying film cites 'communications breakdown'

BY DEREK JOHNSON
For Community Life

The next project that local filmmaker Jon Doscher and his company, Starline Films, will concentrate on is as homegrown as the filmmaker.

"I'm very excited about the two projects Starline is working on," he said. "Yes, they are true stories that have tragic story lines, but they ultimately result in positive messages for the audience. Besides, they've both taken place right here in New Jersey."

Doscher is moving full speed ahead with *4CHOSEN*, a film about broken dreams, racial profiling, and redemption. In fact, Doscher recently interviewed the Rev. Al Sharpton for a documentary film about that incident.

Recently, though, the buzz around northern Bergen County has been caused by Starline's next project, *Anyone's Son*. The film is getting a lot of attention locally because it tells the shocking story of Pascack Hills alumnus, Harry De La Roche. On Thanksgiving weekend in 1976, De La Roche murdered four of his family members while they slept in their Mont-

vale home.

Despite getting hundreds of people to help in telling the story accurately, not all the feedback on the project has been positive. Doscher is not surprised, but feels that "anyone who has anything negative to say about this project does not know the intent of the filmmakers. We are not making a sensationalized horror story. This will be the truest telling of these events to date, and it will be tastefully done with a valuable message."

He said that *Anyone's Son* is not about the murder, but rather about the breakdown that led to the murder.

De La Roche could indeed have been anyone's son and the tragedy could have been prevented.

That is why he wants so many people involved, because the interest is in the elements that led up to the incident. "For something like this to happen," Doscher says, "it needed all the ingredients: An overwhelming father forcing Harry to be someone that he was not, a mother siding with the father, a boy who had some social disorders, a boy who should have been counseled, a boy who slipped through the cracks in high school"

That is why so many people have been interviewed—former classmates, neighbors, lawyers, psychologists, and law enforcement agents.

Recently several teachers and students have helped shed light on De La Roche's childhood as well as the impact of the event. It is widely understood that De La Roche was mocked, ridiculed, and abused from a young age, and it appears that a lot of people turned their heads the other way.

"Thirty years ago people were terrified to cooperate," Doscher said. "Now that the smoke has

cleared, people are coming forward to give the story more and more interesting facets. The support has been incredible, above and beyond my expectations."

That support was also felt when Doscher recently spoke at a Park Ridge Rotary meeting. Not only were individuals very supportive, but many local businesses have invited Starline Films to use their businesses in the film. For authenticity, the plans are to shoot *4CHOSEN* and *Anyone's Son* right here in New Jersey.

Much of the research and many of the interviews will appear in the

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PHOTO COURTESY OF LAWRENCE S. HAYNS

Jon Doscher is seen at the Park Ridge Rotary meeting with J. D. Swayles.

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documentary *Harry...A Communication Breakdown*, which is being shot along with the feature film. Starline plans to release the documentary on Nov. 28, 2006, exactly 30 years after the incident.

Starline Films has exclusive rights to the book *Anyone's Son* by Roberta Roesch, a privilege that was not granted to Robert Stigwood (director of *Saturday Night Fever*) or David Suskind (director of *Fort Apache The Bronx* and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*). Roche turned down both directors but trusted Doscher and Starline to

make the film a respectable human interest story. Starline Films also has exclusive rights from De La Roche, whom they recently interviewed in jail.

Doscher believes that *Anyone's Son* is a pertinent story because the core of the film is about the family and educational culture of middle class America. He said he is proud to have the rights to *Anyone's Son* and takes the responsibility of this film seriously. "This film will be PG-13 and it will present a powerful message to parents and children, teachers and students, all members of American culture concerned with social progress. This film is not based on a true story. It is the only story."