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Photo provided

Brendan Jerome (left) and Nick Palmisano are filming a documentary on Atlantic City. Both graduated from Holy Spirit High School and the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Filmmakers dive into A.C. history

Screening raises funds for movie

By **WILLIAM H. SOKOLIC**
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ATLANTIC CITY

The scene opens with the Sands imploding.

Thanks to computer generated images, a new Atlantic City skyline rises from the rubble: Pinnacle Entertainment's \$1.5 billion resort where the Sands stood. Revel Entertainment's equally large casino hotel in the South Inlet. New towers at Trump Taj Mahal, Harrah's, Borgata, Hilton. A smaller hotel casino emerges from a long vacant lot at the foot of Albany Avenue. And a spate of towers sprout next to Borgata under the direction of MGM Mirage.

That's how John Schultz sees the closing shots of a documentary on Atlantic City being filmed by a pair of local art-school grads, Brendan Jerome

and Nick Palmisano. Schultz, co-founder along with Gary Hill of the nonprofit Schultz-Hill Foundation, unveiled his vision before more than 300 guests and participants at a fundraiser for the film last week in the Screening Room at Resorts.

Guests enjoyed small snippets of what will become an hourlong documentary aimed at the film festival circuit.

The foundation has already invested \$22,000 toward the production of "Atlantic City: Waiting to Be Told." The Screening Room event brought in an additional \$50,000 toward a goal of about \$300,000. The filmmakers will work with the foundation to find grants and other funding to complete the documentary.

"This is not about talking heads," Schultz said of the film's approach. "We have so much history in Atlantic City."

"These guys get it," Hill added.

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Film/Pair

approach city with respect

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Both filmmakers came to the project with an appreciation of that history. Both also see their mission as enhancing the resort's image. As such, the documentary takes a geographic, not chronological, approach. For example, footage of The Pier Shops at Caesars will segue into the history of the Million Dollar Pier on the same footprint at the turn of the last century. And the legalized gambling of today will be compared to the very illegal gambling of past eras.

"People who see this will gain a respect and understanding of Atlantic City on a different level," said Palmisano, a Margate native.

"We looked at the 1920s and 1930s and saw today," said Jerome, an Absecon native. "It's similar."

The architecture in the 1920s and 1930s was not only impressive for the times but broke new ground. Convention Hall, now Boardwalk Hall, was a marvel of engineering and the Blenheim hotel was the first to use steel reinforcement and concrete, said Robert E. Ruffolo, chairman of the Atlantic City Historical Museum and owner of Princeton Antiques Bookshop. But every city loses its past to progress, he said. Atlantic City is no different.

The two 27-year-olds read books and talked to people like Ruffolo and Allen "Boo" Pergament, an Atlantic City historian.

"The best thing about the film is the innovative idea of showing the past and what to expect in the future," Pergament said. "We had an extensive interview, and they took a number of my pictures. It looks like they're on the right track to present a different flavor to tie in the past with the future."

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That Jerome and Palmisano are local kids with a deep interest in local history makes it that much more memorable, he said.

The filmmakers speak to their generation. A lot of people feel the casinos negate the past in an effort to reach younger customers, Pergament said.

"But I found from my experience that many young people do have an interest in the history in this area. I deal with it on a daily basis."

Jerome and Palmisano graduated both Holy Spirit High School in Absecon and University of the Arts in Philadelphia together. Jerome co-produced a documentary for public television about the Philadelphia School District and also worked for MTV Networks, where he worked on a documentary about rapper Tupac Shakur.

The two formed 11th Floor Creative Group as an avenue to do work on commercials and other projects.

"But we're focusing on the documentary," Palmisano said.

Books on the history of Atlantic City are far more plentiful than documentaries, Ruffolo said.

Vicki Gold Levi made "Boardwalk Ballyhoo: The Magic of Atlantic City." Public television produced a couple of documentaries. And HBO portrayed the seedier side of the resort.

"But I don't think there's been a true documentary film done on Atlantic City," Ruffolo said.

The two men would like to complete the project in 12 months, but a lot depends on the funding.

In the end, Pergament said "this will pay off."

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