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ROCHESTER SCREENWRITER EARNS FINALIST HONORS FOR FREDERICK DOUGLASS' STORY IN BUFFALO FILM FEST

Kerry Gleason's "North Star" Competes for Top Award at May Cinema Event

ROCHESTER, NY (April 7, 2009) -- Rochester author Kerry Gleason's warts-and-all screenplay about the life of Frederick Douglass earned accolades as one of the year's best entries in the Third Annual Buffalo Niagara Falls Film Festival. "North Star: The Life of Frederick Douglass" is one of 12 finalists for "Best Screenplay" in the 2009 competition, which has attracted entries from around the globe.

The 2009 Buffalo Niagara Falls Film Festival begins May 1, with highlights including tributes to George Lucas' film classic American Graffiti, the John Wayne Legacy Celebration and a black-tie affair celebrating actor Lou Gossett, Jr., promoting education and awareness of racism, ignorance and social apathy. Gleason hopes his name will be read as the winner at the gala awards ceremony the evening of May 10 at the Delaware Mansion, 414 Delaware Ave. in Buffalo.

"It is a honor to be recognized in such a prestigious and competitive arena as the Buffalo Film Festival because the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls have played such an important role in so many classic films," Mr. Gleason said. "Win or lose, it's a huge privilege to be nominated as a finalist."

A Western New York native, Mr. Gleason described "North Star: The Life of Frederick Douglass" as an action-adventure feature film. The story line traces Douglass' life from a young slave boy with great powers of observation to his harrowing escape from slavery, through his development as a great orator and author, his exile in Europe and on to his ultimate success as a free man. Mr. Gleason says he opted to write the screenplay as a feature film instead of a documentary because Douglass was the quintessential underdog who overcame tremendous odds. He was a fugitive slave and later, after his freedom, became an ideological fugitive who earned the respect of five U.S. Presidents, beginning with Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Gleason says private readings of his script evoked hours of discussions about racism in America, and about marital fidelity. "North Star" depicts Douglass' striking extra-marital affair with Julia Griffin, one of several sexual dalliances connected with the civil rights pioneer.

The Buffalo film fest is the first for which Gleason submitted "North Star" as an entry. Appropriately, he was notified by e-mail on St. Patrick's Day, a good omen he says because it was two Irishmen who purchased Douglass' freedom, allowing the exiled fugitive slave to return to the United States, where he moved to Rochester and became the nation's leading orator and advocate for abolition. He noted that Douglass fits in well with the film festival themes of larger-than-life heroes like John Wayne and the topics that will be discussed by Mr. Gossett.

"Even in Rochester, few people know the total Douglass legacy as America's first powerful African-American civil rights leader," Gleason says, adding, "Without Frederick Douglass, there might never have been a Martin Luther King, Jr., a Rosa Parks, a Jesse Jackson, an Oprah Winfrey or a Barack Obama. His is a story that deserves to be told, and must be seen to be believed."

Gleason said he began researching Douglass' life in January 2004, and in 2006, shut down his business, Gleason Public Relations, for six weeks to write the first draft. Subsequent drafts required another year of rewriting, and Gleason is now confident that his script is bold enough to attract the interest of a producer and nationwide distribution.

The winner of the screenplay competition at the Buffalo Niagara Falls Film Festival is awarded an etched glass globe and a small cash award, if sponsors are found. The most important facet of the nomination is the ability of aspiring screenwriters to gain the attention of major-studio and independent film producers who might finance the making of the movie.

Gleason, 48, is an award-winning journalist and public relations executive who has made his mark on the food and beverage industry (Wendy's International, Coca-Cola, the Buddy System and others), medical and health care (Johnson & Johnson) and in internet marketing. He's been a marketing consultant for about 200 clients and with dozens of entrepreneurial start-ups. He is no stranger to Buffalo, where he operated the Tuesday Night Supper Club, organizing almost 30 unique dinner events from 2003 to 2005. In 2007, he launched Pizza All-Stars™ as a fund raiser to help the ALS Association fight Lou Gehrig's Disease. The St. Bonaventure graduate calls Irondequoit, N.Y. home.

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