



THE FUTURE of Detroit filmmaking as represented by Nicole Sylvester (left), Frank Stovall, Curtis "Al-Nuke" Franklin, Marlon Reid and Brian Heath. The group has supported each other's film projects and they are hoping to create their own Detroit-based studio. — Ron Wainwright photo

Black filmmakers

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Windsor International Festival of Film, and won Best Short at the Cinema Shorts Internet Film Festival. Her most recent film is "Layla's Girl," loosely based upon her estranged mother's death. She has also received the Cable ICE award for her special, "The North American International Auto Show."

"The films that we do — regardless of the budget level — look good because we understand film," she said. "We're not just out here running around with a camera calling ourselves filmmakers. We continue to study and that's what we believe in."

The state of Black filmmaking in Detroit is good in her opinion, even though there is still work to be done.

"I think it's at a good point," she said. "We've been doing this for a while now. I believe that Alisa (her business partner), myself and Al-Nuke (an independent filmmaker) are going to go to the next level. We as filmmakers have different voices. The biggest obstacle is not whether you're Black or not, is money."

As a producer, Sylvester has helped to put out products by other filmmakers, the latest being the urban drama "17000 Block," a film by rapper-turned-filmmaker Curtis "Al Nuke" Franklin, a former host of the cable show "Video Vibes." His background is what he calls the real life "Get Rich or Die Trying."

"I believe in my projects," said Franklin. "If I have to knock door-to-door, video stores, record stores, Best Buy, whatever I've got to do, I'm going to do it. I believe that a lot of filmmakers in Detroit have the mentality of backpack filmmakers, meaning that they're waiting on someone to finish their projects. We have to finish our projects, we have to put our projects out, we have to distribute our projects. We can't wait on (anyone)."

"17000 Block" follows the life of Buck, the young protagonist (played by Franklin) who is caught between the codes of loyalty and the harsh realities of surviving life in the ghetto as a notorious drug dealer. Nuke does not gloss over anything; first and foremost, he is "a hustler," but he has thrown a positive spin on the term.

"I'll sell my house to put my movie out if I need to, that's how I feel. The next one I'm doing is a \$1.5 million dollar film," he said. "With 'R.A.C.E.,' they're either going to love me or hate me. This film is an epic. It will show you things in our society and how we're against each other."

Franklin credits Sylvester with helping him put his film career on the map.

"Nicole Sylvester has been a filmmaker in Detroit when there was no film market," he said. "She was here, and she has lived for what she believes in — she was the one that pushed me to become a full-time filmmaker. She links everyone together. It's a small circle and I believe it's going to stay small because we're not stabbing each other in the back. We're all able to work with one another and we respect one another."

Brian Heath, a photographer-turned-documentary-filmmaker, has a real problem with the boxes most Black filmmakers are thrown into.

"Space or fantasy? We don't have the opportunity to do those types of films because our films have to be about real life in the ghetto or drug related," he said. "We're stuck in a place where we still have to tell the bad stories for our films to happen. Why do our films have to use the stereotypes that (many) people have about us?"

His advice to upcoming filmmakers is to study the classics.

"Watch as many old black and white films as possible to understand lighting and composition," he said. "Those are the most important things."

Heath also sees the acting talent in Detroit as topnotch.

"We've got some of the best actors coming out of Detroit and going to Hollywood on a regular basis and getting jobs. The acting database pool is extremely good," he said.

"I'm a strong believer that Detroit is on the rise," said Frank Stovall, a filmmaker currently working on a new documentary on poetry in Detroit: "SPIT: The Evolution of Revolution." "I believe the current administration we have on the mayoral level is ready to embrace the arts more."

Stovall, who studied film-

making at Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan, chooses to stay in Detroit because it is the ideal location for him.

"There's a lot of undiscovered talent in Detroit," he said. "My desire is to become a big fish in a small pond in Detroit's arts community, so that's why I stay here. If the circle is limited, if you go to the coast already with visual résumé, already with recognition, it's quicker, that much simpler. As Detroit filmmakers our largest obstacle is just establishing that film can be professionally created in a workspace that's not on the East Coast or West Coast. Filmmaking in Detroit is on the rise."

Alisa Lomax has made the short films, "Nobody Knows" and "Minor Blues," and the television programs, "Shape Up Michigan," "Babesworld" and "A Moment in Our History." She has also done commercials for Ford Motor Co., Kmart and Marygrove College. Lomax thought she was going to be a business major, but her exposure to independent film changed her perspective. She and Sylvester met in 1999, and their partnership has remained strong and productive.

"I have to say it's been great," she said. "I liked her instantly, so we started working together and we have complementary talents. I consider myself a director first, and I don't know if I would trust someone else to write them."

Lomax wants to try something different, to test the limits of cinema.

"I feel that the stories, the ideas I have, make me different," she said. "I feel very strongly about your being able to live and work where you want to live and work. Your stories come from wherever you are. I don't feel as if you have to go to L.A. That's what independence is."

To make donations, give grants or other funding to Autumn Rain Features, or to find out more about "17000 Block," "Layla's Girl" and other film projects, call (313) 361-6408, visit www.autumnrainfeatures.com, or e-mail ncslly@aol.com.

The Woodward

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fully made plans for the opening of their restaurant. Representatives from the Computware building notified them, requesting that The Woodward be housed there.

Rice said he stepped in as a partner because he was looking for projects that would help move the city forward.

"I see myself getting involved with two exceptional men who are like-minded," said Rice, 33. "When they presented the idea to me, I was at a point in my life when I was getting ready to do something, not just anything, but something special in the city that would make a difference."

Inside The Woodward are many things that reflect the essence of Detroit. Dishes include White Chicken Chili, which includes tender pieces of chicken with white beans, vegetables and cumin; The Woodward Strip, a 12-ounce pan-seared New York strip covered with cracked pepper and kosher salt; the Augustus Caesar salad with romaine hearts, shaved parmesan, tossed in lemon Caesar dressing and cracked pepper.

The Woodward's signature martinis include DunWright,

with Ketel One vodka with dry Vermouth; the Motown, which has rye whiskey, sweet and dry Vermouth with a twist; and Michigan Avenue, which has Vodka, sour apple, pineapple and grenadine.

Southern Hospitality Group, owned by Frank Taylor, serves as the management company for The Woodward. Taylor teamed up with former Detroit Lion Robert Porcher and chef Jerry Nottage to open three restaurants in Detroit, Seldom Blues, Detroit's Breakfast House and Grille, and Grand City Grille.

Nottage, executive concept chef for the Southern Hospitality Restaurant Group, developed the menu for The Woodward.

Taylor said he saw an opportunity to help two younger men who were looking to build on Detroit's improving economy.

"It is important for the city to grow out and for other business leaders to help younger businesses along," said Taylor.

"When I first started managing the restaurant, their expertise was not in management so they asked Southern Hospitality Group, and although we don't want to get into too many of

these (projects), we agreed."

"I think it is important to develop a network of like-minded people who can move ahead," Porcher said. "The city is an untapped jewel that we have to start developing."

Although Porcher also owns restaurants, he noted that people enjoy having dining options.

The 4,100 square-foot restaurant features a circular bar that reflects Campus Martius Park. The upscale restaurant is perfect as a business meeting location or as a first-class place to dine evenings or other times.

The restaurant also reflects the 1807 streetscape of Woodward Avenue. The hard wood floors and 13-foot ceilings create a comfortable and sophisticated environment

Meals range from \$13 to \$27 and validated parking is available in the Computware structure. Valet parking is also available at the front entrance.

Hours are Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to midnight; and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

For additional information, call (313) 964-4444.

NACWC

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"I learned to love the organization," she said. "Once you start reading about it and you meet some of the people (you find) it's the greatest sisterhood in this country, and I've been with it ever since."

Cooper served as both an employee and as a volunteer, and as an officer on every level.

"It just becomes a part of you. You learn to love it and you just stay with it because you believe in what it does."

The motto NACWC is "Lifting as we climb."

"This is one of the greatest sisterhoods in the United States," she said. "It's too bad that people don't know about it, but we're trying to do more along that line. I like to refer to it as walking softly and carrying a big stick. We do a lot of community work, but we don't make a lot of noise. We just do what needs to be done."

NACWC is not just about women, however. The group is also interested in helping men and women to coexist and work together, and much of that starts with the family.

"You can develop a young woman to her final womanhood as much as you want, but if there are no fine men for her to be involved with, then that's what you get," she said. "And so we (know) that we need to teach the male and the female how to relate to each other and to the greater society, so this a way of stopping as much (domestic violence) as we possibly can. We don't get on TV and make a whole lot of noise. We do what we do in a quiet, but forceful



MEMBERS OF the NACWC include (front row) Margaret Cooper, president; Carol Early, national executive secretary; and Peggy Faulk Myles, national supervisor of youth. In back row (from left) are Dr. Marie Wright Tolliver, national 1st vice president; Ms. Brown, PR; and Paulette Zozier, state president of the Michigan association. — Andrea Muhammad photo

and consistent way."

First National Vice President Dr. Marie Wright Tolliver, a native of Saginaw, views the NACWC as one of the best proponents to help the family. Like Cooper, she was introduced to the organization at a young age, but it was her mother, who was a charter member, who was responsible for that introduction.

"My mother got me involved. I went to a couple of meetings...now I just love it," she said. "It's been the wind beneath my wings, and I encourage other

young ladies to join our ranks because I know what it's done for me."

One of the things she enjoys about the organization is its diversity.

"We have people from all walks of life and religions, and we all come together for the common goal of lifting as we climb, so it's not like a seniority or fraternity," she said.

To acquire additional information on the NACWC's meeting in August at the Detroit Marriott Hotel, visit the website, <http://www.nacwc.org/intro.htm>.

College

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assets.

The State of Michigan administers the Michigan Education Savings Program (MESP) as its 529 plan. This savings plan is designed to encourage saving for future higher education costs by allowing contributions to grow tax-free. The money investors take out later from the plans is free from federal taxes as long as it is used to pay for qualified higher education expenses.

While other states and the District of Columbia offer at least one 529 College Savings Plan similar to the Michigan Education Savings Plan, only MESP offers a Michigan income tax deduction for Michigan residents. Although this can be purchased directly from the plan administrator, industry estimates show that as many as three out of four investors purchase their plan with the help of an investment professional, such as a financial advisor or broker.

"Regardless of how the plan is purchased, investors should have a basic understanding of the plan's benefits, costs and tax implications," Watters said. To help investors select the most appropriate college savings plan, OFIS is suggesting four key questions investors should ask their financial professional before investing in a college savings plan:

1. What are the plan's tax implications? Tax treatment of college savings plan contributions, earnings and withdrawals varies from one state to another. Michigan allows residents who participate in the MESP to claim a state income tax deduction on contributions up to a limit. In addition, the MESP provides residents with a state tax break on money taken out of 529 plans to pay qualified college expenses. Make sure you understand the tax treatment of contributions to, and earnings distributions from, both in-state and out-of-state 529 plans.

2. What are the plan's expenses? All college savings plans have associated costs, which can affect your investment return. Plans sold by financial professionals often cost more than plans purchased directly from the state. These extra costs generally stem from sales loads or other fees associated with share classes, annual distribution fees, including fees used to compensate the financial professional. You are enti-

tled to a complete list of the costs associated with the plans. Be sure to ask for it.

3. How are financial professionals compensated for these plans? Ask whether the advisor or broker receives a commission from any of the plans he or she is recommending.

4. Does an out-of-state plan's performance or costs outweigh tax benefits of a home state plan? No two plans are exactly alike, and in some cases, it might make sense to consider an out-of-state plan. Make sure you look at all aspects of both in-state and out-of-state plans before investing.

Politics

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social well-being of the community," said Michigan Chronicle Publisher Sam Logan. "The series' overall goal is to provoke thought and generate new ideas in various sectors that will continue to push our community forward."

Logan also said the four-part series is part of a major diversification and growth strategy for the Chronicle.

"As a voice in the community, we recognize the necessity to change with a diverse and growing marketplace," he said. "To do so, we have launched a strategic initiative to position us as a true multimedia resource."

"Before selecting any plan recommended by a financial professional, it is always wise to do your own research to double-check this advice," Watters said.

For more information about college savings plans, visit the OFIS website at www.michigan.gov/ofis to view a brochure put together by NASAA, along with the College Savings Plan Network and the Investment Company Institute called "A Guide to Understanding College Savings Plans."

For more information regarding the State of Michigan's MESP 529 plan, please visit <http://www.misaves.com>.

Young Jr.

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ing of the guard.

"People are becoming more aware in understanding what their family left behind," Young said. "They are starting to move forward, we are really understanding the role of a young person. We are the next generation and there is a movement that has transcended in all respects."

"What I plan on doing is making taxpayers' burdens easier. I want to give back to the taxpayers and I want to move more businesses here to this great state to do business, especially in Detroit."

While many may compare Young Jr.'s leadership style to

that of his father, he said those shoes that cannot be filled.

"There will never be another Coleman Alexander Young," he said. "I am so humbly honored to be in the position that I am in. Everything we are going through, we are the product of the legacy he left behind. I want to continue to build on his accomplishments by making sure people know they are (cared about). I want them to know that the government cares and we will do all that we can to accommodate them."

The Primary Election will be held in August and the General Election in November.

Briefs

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subsequently died on Feb. 27.

Terrence Howard signature Jeep Commander to be auctioned off on eBay

Academy Award-nominated actor Terrence Howard and Chrysler 300 lead designer Ralph Gilles unveiled a customized 2006 Jeep Commander on Feb. 25 on the red carpet at the 37th NAACP Image Awards.

As title sponsor of the Image Awards, DaimlerChrysler brought the two together for the one-of-a-kind vehicle collaboration as part of "My Cus-

tom Style," a DaimlerChrysler and NAACP initiative to increase diversity in the field of automotive design.

The Howard-designed Jeep Commander, which features his signature on exterior door plaques and headrest embroidery, will be donated to the College for Creative Studies (CCS) in Detroit. The personalized vehicle will then be auctioned off on eBay March 3-12 (www.eBay.com, item number 4616180090) through Giving



Terrence Howard

Works, the Internet auction site's charity listings supporting non-profit organizations.

The proceeds from the auction will create a minority automotive design scholarship fund at CCS in the name of the NAACP and DaimlerChrysler.

Additionally, DaimlerChrysler and the NAACP will collaborate to identify a school offering the study of motion pictures arts and sciences to establish a scholarship fund with a contribution that matches the final sale price of the vehicle on eBay. Similar to the CCS scholarship, the matched contribution will be used to benefit a minority student in their study of the arts.