

A Taste of Cannes in Queens:

Forest Hills hosts first international film festival

By Ayala Ben-Yehuda 11/21/2003

The producer, cast and casting director of the film "Downtown" discuss the art of independent moviemaking at a Queens International Film Festival seminar.

A little bit of Cannes came to Forest Hills last weekend with the first-ever Queens International Film Festival, an event designed to showcase the work of independent filmmakers and allow aspiring movie industry professionals to exchange ideas on their craft.



Like the famed French festival on a smaller scale, the event featured 29 independent film screenings over three days, jury awards and parties at Queens Boulevard restaurants near the Midway Theatre, where the movies were shown.

But the event also had educational seminars on independent movie making, including one for actors at the Il Pescatore restaurant Saturday afternoon at which Domenica Cameron Scorsese, actress and daughter of director Martin Scorsese, was a panelist.

"We're excited because we're accomplishing what we wanted to do," said Marie Jocelyne Castaldo, a former producer at Vivendi Universal who recently moved to Rego Park.

"The melting pot of culture here is extraordinary," said Castaldo. "There is a perfect base here for an international film festival."

The event's program gave rave reviews to Queens as a natural home for a film festival, given its two major studios - Silvercup and Kaufman Astoria - and its use as the backdrop for countless flicks.

She and festival co-founder John DePrima, a Flushing native, put together the event in just three months.

The festival, kicked off with a ribbon cutting Friday by Councilman John Liu (D-Flushing), featured works by filmmakers from Queens and around the world.

Films screened at the event included "How to Go Out on a Date in Queens," a romantic comedy set in an Italian restaurant; "How it All Went Down," the story of a film producer turned drug dealer; and "Downtown," a tale of homeless New York City runaways starring Domenica Scorsese, John Savage ("The Deer Hunter"), Genevieve Bujold ("Earthquake") and Chad Allen ("Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman").