

# Bringing the Brighter Side of Brooklyn to the Small Screen

By Craig McGuire

Contrary to what most of the outside world may think, Brooklyn is not the filthy, drug-ravaged, Mafia-controlled gangland portrayed in the media and popular films.

Bruce Friedman and Albert Ritondo, producers of "That's Brooklyn," are on a mission to dispel these misconceptions, and they're using public access television to do it.

Friedman and Ritondo produce the weekly half-hour program which profiles different aspects of the borough. "That's Brooklyn" airs every Wednesday at 8:30 p.m. on Time-Warner Cable's channel 34 and Cablevision's channel 67.

"Watching the six o'clock news, I became upset because Brooklyn is not the six o'clock news," explained Friedman, noting that rather, "It's a good place to raise children and a good place for adults to enjoy themselves, to work as well as live."

Friedman advises Brooklynites, "Don't be a stick in the mud, become a tourist. Get on a subway, any subway, take it a few stops and then get off and experience a new culture."

Friedman, a salesman for the Pavey Envelope Company, said the thrust of the program is to encourage people to "not just try the different food and events, but to experience another culture."

Ron Sweiger, who does the historical research for the program, said the impact Brooklyn has had upon this nation is often overlooked.

According to Sweiger, a teacher at Public School 219, 1060 Clarkson Ave-

"What we want is to encourage a blossoming of a new pride in Brooklyn," explained Friedman, "a new respect for the landmarks, a new respect for the people."

According to Friedman, the genesis of the concept for "That's Brooklyn" was developed separately by him and Ritondo roughly 10 years ago.

Their ideas for the program were finally realized thanks to the advent of public access television on cable.

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While the program is rich in historical information, Friedman insists the show does more than regurgitate a simple history lesson.

The two men then pooled their talents, with Friedman writing and directing and Ritondo filming and developing, and launched the show earlier this year.

Brooklyn Cable Access Television (BCAT), which

airs the program, just renewed "That's Brooklyn" for another 13-week run.

Among other interesting aspects of Brooklyn that the team has profiled are the Brooklyn Dodgers, the Loews Kings movie house, Prospect Park, Lundy's restaurant, and others.

## Twenty-Eight Minutes Of Brooklyn

The production team has often struck turbulent waters on their maiden voyage across the airwaves.

"We go out and film material for to the particular subject," explained Friedman. "When this is all finished, we have a four-hour extravaganza that we have to fit into 28 minutes [of air time]."

Sweiger remarked, "Thank goodness I'm not part of the editing team."

According to Friedman, the editing process takes between 16-20 hours per show.

"Why do we do it? There is no money involved," asked Friedman of himself. "Because it's the most fun you would believe, plus we feel we're doing something good."

While the duo receives input from various sources, the primary fountain that the show taps into flows

from the senior residents of Brooklyn.

"It's fascinating to listen to all of these wonderful stories when we go out to tape," said Sweiger, an avid collector of Brooklyn memorabilia.

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While the production process may have its pitfalls, the producers are never at a loss for material.

"The greatest thing we have to offer is the people who live in Brooklyn, and our greatest export is the people who leave Brooklyn," said Friedman.

Sweiger noted that the "Brooklyn Club" in Las Vegas, Nevada, with a membership roll exceeding 400, recently ordered a shipment of slides from him.

Sweiger commented, "You can take the kid out

of Brooklyn, but you can't take Brooklyn out of the kid."

Friedman agreed, relating how a man he encountered told him, "My kid is going to school in a homogenized classroom and he'll never know the benefits of experiencing different cultures and ethnic groups that he would have had if he had grown up in Brooklyn. In a way I'm sad about it."

Friedman said that if they accomplish anything they hope to spark renewed interest because, "We don't want to see Brooklyn close up around us."

The producers also want to use the program as a vehicle to bridge the gap among the many different people in Brooklyn.

"If you get a chance to talk to somebody and understand them and their culture," explained Friedman, "there is less to be afraid of."

Coming up, viewers expect to see shows concerning the various churches of Brooklyn, the Haitian Parade, the many bridges linking the borough to its joining areas, Victoria Flatbush, and other interesting topics.