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Betsy Goldman around Venice

Venice Media District gives back to the community

BY BETSY GOLDMAN

Two years ago the Los Angeles City Council designated Venice as an official "media district."

From Digital Domain to one-person enterprises, Venice has long attracted artistic occupations and endeavors. The problem has been the lack of a cohesive community. The Venice Media District has changed that by bringing these dynamic forces together.

The third annual fall mixer was held in November to provide networking opportunities and business-to-business consciousness for the many media oriented services in and around Venice and to showcase a short documentary for non-profit Venice Arts created by several of these industry companies that donated their services.

One of the missions of the Venice Media District is to enable nonprofit organizations to benefit from the local wealth of resources for media projects. After the film was shown to the audience at the mixer, Joanne Kim, director of photography and new media at Venice Arts, acknowledged how invaluable it is for a nonprofit such as Venice Arts to have people in the industry produce pieces like the documentary to use for fundraising purposes, since a nonprofit doesn't necessarily have the availability of skills to create this type of media to show the work it does and how it benefits the children it works with, as in the case of Venice Arts.

The film was created by ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi/LA with post production services provided by Spotwelders, Ravenswork, Elias Arts and Riot.

Spotwelders, an editorial house



LUCAS SPAULDING represented Venice editorial house Spotwelders in post-production services for the Venice Arts documentary shown at the Venice Media District's fall mixer. (Photo by Lisa Spaulding)

established in Venice in 1993, was represented in the project by Lucas Spaulding. He feels it's important for people who make money off the media to give back, especially today when budgets are shrinking.

"A lot of people have limited ways to give back and giving services is a great way to fulfill that," he says. "In terms of Venice Arts, just looking at those kids and realizing how little they have and how much I have and a lot of us have, it's pretty apparent that more needs to be done to help those who are behind the eightball."

As an editor for national television commercials, Lucas is used to seeing storyboards so he is able to conceptualize what is going to happen. Just by its nature, a documentary can't be staged. Jeni

Stewart and Mark Tripp of Saatchi & Saatchi/LA spearheaded the project.

"To their credit they did a really good job but they really didn't know what they were getting into," he says.

They were unable to find other people to sign on 100 percent to participate in the production part of the film so they ended up doing most of the work themselves.

"When you have a couple of people scrambling to get things done between working on commercials, then it becomes even more catch as catch can," he says.

In addition, some of the students were reluctant to participate due to the language barrier.

"We had to use what we had," says Lucas. "Luckily the kids' artwork spoke for itself. On camera they have little to say, but you get a picture of their world by looking at the photographs.

"Their photographs open up into their world to see who they are and what they were thinking about. Since they were quiet and camera-shy we let them speak through their work. We had to follow a path wherever it took us to tell the story."

In addition to providing time and talent to nonprofits, the Venice Media District offers internship mentoring. During the Golden Age of Cinema, from the late 1920s to the mid-40s, this type of program was called an apprenticeship. Young workers learned a trade from the masters so it could be continued on to the next generation. The updated version is called mentoring and it can be carried out in a number of ways.

"As you go through life, school-wise especially, you remember

people who taught you things and helped out," says Lucas. "It's great to be one of these people. If people who have learned things don't take the time to teach others then a lot of the craft is lost. It also makes you feel good about yourself and when you teach you learn more about it as well."

A summer high school intern program began in the summer of 2007. Kristen Ramirez, who didn't know how to use a camera before joining Venice Arts five years ago, was placed as an intern with Final Cut, where she says the experience will help her get a job in the future. More outreach will be available this year with the new Internship Program for Higher Education, which will focus on colleges and graduate schools.

"I think it's important to donate services to nonprofits and mentor interns because the contribution is much larger than a cash donation," says Robert Feist, Media District co-chair and owner of Ravens-

work.

"By donating your expertise to a cause, you bring a level of involvement and leadership that would otherwise be impossible for a charity to achieve if they had to purchase that service. The best any of us can do is to contribute what we do best. I believe it can change the world."

This year will be even more challenging for nonprofits and first-time job seekers in the media field. If you are a creative company interested in donating services to a nonprofit or if you are a nonprofit and would like to avail your organization to their services or for more information on the intern programs, contact the Venice Media District at www.venicemediadistrict.org/.