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**THE FUTURE OF
 BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT**

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FILM: Features



Cine scholars

High school students are telling their stories with the help of Hollywood filmmakers and Scenarios USA.

By Deborah Wilker
 When a group of student screenwriters from Mission High School in southeastern Texas suddenly found themselves without a director of photography for their short film "Toothpaste," they didn't call the captain of the audiovisual squad. Instead, they dialed up filmmaker Robert Rodriguez, who sent over veteran cinematographer Guillermo Navarro.

The students had a Hollywood "in" because their film was being produced by Scenarios USA, a New York-based nonprofit organization that solicits frank student essays about sex and health then helps take those words from page to screen.

"Without the involvement of the Los Angeles film community, there would be no Scenarios," says Maura Minsky, a former ABC News producer who co-founded the organization five years ago with Kristen Joiner, a former employee of the stalwart nonprofit Habitat for Humanity.

Michael Apted, Griffin Dunne, David Frankel, Tamara Jenkins, Doug Liman and Ben Younger are among the other directors who have volunteered their services for Scenarios, which sponsors writing contests in three school districts in New York, Florida and Texas (Minsky plans to expand the program nationwide in 2007). The completed films, which have played everywhere from the Sundance Channel to Showtime, have the look and feel of top

Pictured: Director Ben Younger, left, volunteered his time to direct the short film "Toothpaste," written by five Texas teens.

More coverage:

Local heroes: Entertainment industry professionals are giving back to the communities that surround them.

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THE FUTURE OF BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT

harnessing the power of movies, television, music, sports and games

documentaries; last year, Salon.com called them "the hippest, best-edited, most entertaining (sex education) videos ever made."

organizations with entertainment supporters.

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The movies resonate, Minsky believes, "because they're produced with support and donations from the same companies that make our feature films." Those companies include CFI Film Labs, Kodak, Panavision, Technicolor and postproduction shops Madhouse and Postworks.

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Several South Florida companies -- including Paskal Lighting, Unique Producers Services and Camera Service Center -- worked gratis during the recent Miami shoot of "A Memoir to My Former Self," written by 17-year-old Miami High senior Katrina Garcia. The film was directed by Jamie Babbit, whose credits include the Fox TV sitcom "Malcolm in the Middle," FX's "Nip/Tuck" and the 2000 feature release "But I'm a Cheerleader."

Babbit, in her eighth month of pregnancy during the late-April shoot, had to obtain an air-travel waiver from her doctor. While most expectant mothers would have seized precious time off from regular work to prepare for the baby's arrival and/or relax, Babbit wouldn't hear of it, saying she "could never break a promise to a student.

Minsky notes that such devotion to Scenarios is not unusual.

"Working on these films combines (Hollywood) talent with their interest in helping out," she says.

For more information about Scenarios USA, visit www.scenariosusa.org.

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