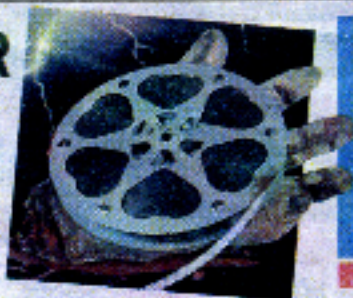


HORROR MOVIE FRIGHT FEST!

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'Heart of Stone' is awe-inspiring

By JAMES VERRIERE

Whatever its shortcomings, "Heart of Stone," a documentary executive produced by Zach Braff ("Scrubs") and winner of the Audience Award at the Slamdance Film Festival, should be seen in every high school in the United States.

The film, directed by Beth

Toni Kravant ("The Right to Be Wrong"), was apparently inspired by two men, New Jersey's Weequahic High School principal Ron Stone as well as Hal Braff, father of Zach and graduate of Weequahic class of 1952.

Between 1930 and 1960, the Weequahic section of Newark, N.J., the prosperous, semi-suburban child-

MOVIE REVIEW

"HEART OF STONE"

Not rated. At Weiss Newton Cinema.

Grade: B+

hood neighborhood of Philip Roth, among others, was a "Jewish enclave" — and WHS was one of the top schools in the country.

Graduates went on to college to become doctors, lawyers, accountants, as well as a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, and eventually moved away from Newark to the less turbulent suburbs.

It was then that Weequahic High was pounded by budget cuts, neighborhoods ravaged by drugs and poverty, broken families and gang violence. By 2000, Weequahic was one of the most violent high schools in the country.

But that changed after Stone became principal.

As a young man from the predominantly Italian-American North Ward, Stone had seen his share of racial tension. But he had a plan — and even more importantly strength of character, the tongue of a Baptist preacher, an imposing physical presence and the cooperation and contributions of the Braff-cofounded Weequahic Alumni Association, whose members, both Jewish and African-American, had a soft place in their hearts for their school.

Together, these two forces made a difference. Stone eventually convinced the Crips and Bloods to declare a truce at school so that their members might have the opportunity to take advantage of their only way of getting off the deadly, mean streets of Newark: a free education.

Featuring brief appearances by disgraced former Mayor Sharpe James, current Mayor Cory Booker and poet-playwright Amiri Baraka, "Heart of Stone" is, on another level, a tribute to those teachers who have made a difference in all of our lives.

— James@bostonherald.com
("Heart of Stone" contains profanity.)

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