



Gibbstown man wins Philly Philm Slam award

Published: Saturday, March 26, 2011, 2:46 AM



By **Kelly Roncace/Gloucester County Times**



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Photos provided

Verbatum Jones, (left) EMC Karma, Faze 2, Mic Stew, Alien Architect, Marvelous (their "Emcee" names) discuss their freestyle hip-hop cypher. The Temple University students are all a part of a group on campus who get together and create spontaneous rhymes.

Gibbstown resident Domenick Cucinotta recently won the first-ever Philly Philm Slam for doing what he loves most.

A recent Temple University graduate and film producer/writer/director with Jaunted Productions, Cucinotta hated writing school reports when he was a child.

"I've always been creative," Cucinotta said. "I would write stories all the time when I was younger, even since first grade."

During his freshman year at Paulsboro High School, his English teacher assigned a

five-page paper about "The Odyssey." He also offered students the option of creating a project about the epic novel in place of the written assignment.

"Instead of the same boring book report that I would just get a C-plus on and barely pass, I grabbed my dad's VHS camera and made a movie," Cucinotta said.

This project set the student on his life's path.

"The moment the video played in front of the class and I saw everyone's reaction, that was the moment I remember feeling that I want to do this for the rest of my life," he said.

After the success of that first class project, Cucinotta asked each teacher through high school if he could do a film as a project and they all obliged his request.

"I got nothing less than a 101 on all of them," he said proudly.

After graduation, he enthusiastically entered Temple University as a Film and Media Arts major. And he

hasn't put the camera down since.

His award-winning film, "DaCypher," which also received the Award of Merit in the Accolade Film Festival in Los Angeles and was recently accepted into the Iowa City Film Festival, focuses on a subculture of students at Temple who gather on campus to create spontaneous, freestyle lyrics as a group.

"'DaCypher' is about a group of students who came together and started a freestyle hip-hop cypher at the bell tower in the center of campus," he said. "A cypher is a group of people who gather together, coming up with spontaneous rhymes."

Cucinotta was inspired to film the students after being introduced to them by a friend.

"I've been a huge fan of hip-hop since I was in high school," Cucinotta said. "This just doesn't happen anymore in the hip-hop community like it used to. It is truly hip-hop at its purest form."

He was so impressed with the talent in the cypher, he felt the need to contribute in some way.

"I almost attempted to rap one day," he laughed. "But instead I grabbed my camera, jumped in the middle of the circle and started filming."

From that first day, Cucinotta and his friend met with the group on campus every Friday for a year before he even decided to make these clips into a project.

"When the time came to turn it into a short film (23 minutes long), I already had a bunch of footage to work with," he said.

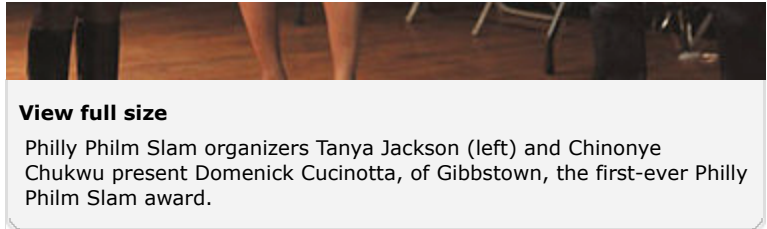
Cucinotta explained that the atmosphere of the cypher is peaceful and the veterans of the group, who are featured in the film, constantly keep control while also allowing participants the freedom to say what they want, however they want.

"My proudest moment in the film is the ending," he said. "I don't want to give it away, but the group follows a set of unwritten rules throughout the film. Toward the end, an outsider enters the cypher and stirs up some controversy. The whole film prepares the audience for these final moments."

In addition to "DaCypher," Cucinotta has also worked on films for Canadian hip-hop



artist Osei Alleyne, aka "Manchilde," reality television's Bam Margera, Philadelphia Eagle Trent Cole and is currently working with Jaunted Productions owner, writer/director Michael Lucas of Paulsboro on the horror film, "Billy's Cult," and a documentary about the Paulsboro High School wrestling team, which he named as the one film that holds the biggest place in his heart so far.

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Philly Philm Slam organizers Tanya Jackson (left) and Chinonye Chukwu present Domenick Cucinotta, of Gibbstown, the first-ever Philly Philm Slam award.

"We are very passionate about this project and have really put our heart into it," he said of himself and partner Lucas. "My dad wrestled for PHS, I wrestled for Coach Morina and my brother, Mike, is a region champion there. Lucas and I have a lot of Paulsboro pride and really want this to be a success for our town."

Lucas described Cucinotta as "young and hungry."

"Dom is an amazing talent and I am lucky to have someone like him working with me," Lucas said. "His growth as a professional is truly a pleasure to watch and I cannot wait to see his full potential. He still has a lot to learn, but he is smart, and focusing on having a legitimate career in this industry."

Inspired by real-life events, Cucinotta hopes his tribute to the wrestling program gains as much attention as his accolades to the Temple University cypher group.

"Like 'DaCypher,' this is my contribution to Paulsboro wrestling and I hope it helps grow the name even bigger than it already is," said Cucinotta.

For more information, visit www.jauntedproductions.com.

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