

Stopping street slaughter

Media push to end 'violence tolerance'

BY ELIZABETH LAZAROWITZ

A NEW short film aimed at curbing gun violence centers on the enduring sorrow of a Brooklyn mother five years after her son was gunned down on a Crown Heights streetcorner.

In the brief but powerful video, Robin Lyde recalls seeing her son Benny, 21, sprawled on the sidewalk near her house.

"So close to home, but not home," she says in the film, "Benny Lyde: A Role Model Dies Young." "I started praying."

Anti-violence advocates are hoping the documentary, and others like it to be screened at Launch Pad in Crown Heights Thursday, will offer a fresh way to bolster efforts to stamp out gun violence in the city.

"When they see a family in pain, I hope people will want to take a stand," Robin Lyde, 48, said. Her son's killer, Cody Nelson, received a five-to-10-year prison sentence in August. "It's my son today. It may be their brother or sister or family member tomorrow."

Clinton Hill-raised Hemamset Angaza, 21, created the Benny Lyde video this spring for Beyond Bullets, an anti-violence campaign by media arts group Downtown Community Television.

"This guy was very close to my age, and

his parents' grief was very real," Angaza said. "I could see myself in the same position — my parents mourning me."

Beyond Bullets recruited Angaza and five other young documentary filmmakers to make a series of short anti-violence videos this spring that it has been screening at schools and community centers.

The Manhattan-based group has Brooklyn beginnings, inspired by the 2004 film "Bullets in the Hood: A Bed-Stuy Story," which was created by two Brooklyn teens in a DCTV film training program.

Thursday's screening of mainly youth-produced videos made through programs like Beyond Bullets and Reel Works Teen Film-making is the work of the Kings County Cinema Society and anti-violence groups that include the Crown Heights Community Medication Center.

In Brooklyn's 77th Precinct, which covers northern Crown Heights, 66 people have been shot so far this year, said the center's director, Amy Ellenbogen.

Through its anti-violence program, SOS Crown Heights, the center plans to launch a media campaign of its own, soliciting young artists to come up with posters, radio and video spots and public service announcements with an anti-gun message for



Robin Lyde at corner where her son Benny was slain in 2005. Photo by Linda Rosier

its 2011 Save Our Streets Multimedia Contest.

"We want to transform the culture from one that's tolerant of violence to one that's intolerant," Ellenbogen said. "Media and the arts are powerful tools in our efforts."

The screening and talk will be held Thursday, beginning at 7 p.m. at Launch Pad, 721 Franklin Ave.

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Trio hopes their ride-share app is Weeel thing

BY ELIZABETH LAZAROWITZ

HOOKING UP with a stranger just might save you some cash.

A group of Brooklyn-based Harvard grads have come up with an iPhone application that helps travelers share cab rides.

Punch in your location, and the application, called Weeels, can order you up a car service and search for other riders headed in the same direction.

"In a city like New York, you've got a lot of people going to generally the same areas, and you've got a lot of empty seats," said Weeels co-founder Alex Pasternack, 27.

"We thought if we could reduce all that wasted space we could reduce traffic and make rides cheaper."

The Brooklyn-based service is aimed at residents outside Manhattan, where public transportation can be inconvenient, especially late at night, said Weeels creator David Mahfouda, 28, who lives in Park Slope.

Mahfouda set out to make America's main mode of transportation — cars and roads — "more social, more environmentally friendly, and most importantly, functional."

By using Weeels instead of spending hours on the subway, "you can sit around and have another beer at the bar and, invariably, someone else will want to go home, too," he said.



Alex Pasternack (l.), David Mahfouda (c.) and Daniel Luxenburg are Brooklyn Harvard grads behind Weeels iPhone app that lets people needing rides to make connections. Photo by Andrew Theodorakis

Weeels has agreements with about half a dozen livery cab operators. Users can either order a car for themselves or request a shared ride from the nearest car service at a prenegotiated price. Shared rides cost each rider about 60% of the total cost.

Since the application's debut this summer, the service has recruited about 2,000 users, Mahfouda said.

Finding partners for shared rides is still not easy, but Mahfouda is hopeful the convenience the service offers will help it fare better than the city's cab-sharing pilot program, which picks up riders at a few fixed locations.

Users sign on to the service using a Facebook account, which Mahfouda thinks will make people less squeamish about getting

in the back seat of a car with someone they don't know.

The company's also working on ways to let users alert people in their own social networks they're looking for rides, so they can share with friends of friends.

"We think the easier we make it, the more people will be interested in trying it," Pasternack said.

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More Local News

Getting jobs on track

Local minority- and women-owned contractors can learn more about working on Resort World New York, the planned casino at Aqueduct Racetrack, during a jobs fair at the track on Friday from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

Under terms of a deal with the state, Tutor-Perini, the general contractor for the Genting Group, must use at least 25% of the goods and services in the construction phase from certified women and minority business enterprises.

The construction of the casino, which is due to open in late spring, is expected to generate 1,300 jobs. For more information, call Tiffany Stiles at

(212)344-3500. Barbara Ross

Managing park geese

A public meeting to discuss recommendations of the Prospect Park Wildlife Management Advisory Committee for the park's waterfowl will be held tomorrow at 6 p.m., at the Prospect Park Picnic House.

The committee has as its main goal the development of a workable plan to manage the park's Canada goose population.

Call (718) 965-8953.

Seminar on Co-op

Neighborhood Housing Services of East Flatbush presents a free seminar today detailing the 320 Sterling St. Co-op Development.

The seminar begins at 6 p.m. at the Crown Heights Library, 560 New York Ave. and will cover information on the application process, layout and eligibility.

Call (718) 469-4679. Go to www.nhsfastflatbush.org.

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