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by
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Taking Chances

Filmmaker **Chris Cardillo** believes his latest project, *Second Chance City*, is the kind of film America needs to see at the moment in time.

S*econd Chance City* is the type of movie with which New Jersey resident Chris Cardillo always hoped to be associated. More importantly, Cardillo believes *Second Chance City* is precisely the kind of socially impactful film that needs to be brought to light.

"I always wanted to make a movie that had social drama and a social cause," says Cardillo, 45, of Medford. "I always wanted to be part of a movie that was current with what's happening in the country. When I read this script a few years ago, I instantly fell in love with it."

Second Chance City is an emotive, fast-paced drama about a young man who, upon release from a 10-year prison sentence, wrestles with reassimilation into society, the challenges of reconnecting with his estranged family, and a second chance at love. Cardillo brought the film to life with his longtime friend and artistic collaborator Samuel C. Morrison Jr., also a New Jersey resident. Co-produced through Morrison's firm, Deck of Cards Entertainment, the film is based on the real-life experiences of Morrison's brother.

"The subject matter is so important at this time in America," Cardillo says. "When I read the script, it struck me how people who are

arrested for a petty crime, often plead out. From there they become labeled, become demonized, become branded; it's like the scarlet letter. These people, who are generally from underserved, underrepresented, and disadvantaged communities, become stuck in a system. After that first strike, they don't get treated fairly.

"When Sam's brother was arrested and was sitting in jail for a while, Sam called me and was very upset," he continues. "I offered to send an attorney friend of mine to him. Within days, his brother was out and treated much differently."

Cardillo's connection to *Second Chance City* began when Morrison asked him to audition for a role in the film. After rejecting the role—"I wasn't right for the part," Cardillo admits—he was asked if he would be interested in directing.

Second Chance City's New Jersey connection extends beyond Cardillo, who moved from his native Pittsburgh to Cherry Hill in high school, and Morrison, who emigrated from Liberia to the Garden State at age three. The film was shot on a \$50,000 budget in just 12 days in February in Mount Laurel, Moorestown, and Medford, as well as parts of Essex County.

"We got a permit to shoot on Main Street in Moorestown," Cardillo recalls. "We are grateful for the number of business owners who accommodated us by allowing us to film in their locations. Major brands allowed us to place their products in our productions. We also used production houses to shoot things like jail scenes."

Cardillo first was bitten by the film bug in Pittsburgh, where he was classically trained

on the viola and violin. Growing up in a creative family convinced him to chase creative pursuits once he became an adult.

"My brother, my dad, and I would come up with these little skits," he recalls. "Then, when our parents would go out, my brother and I would do the skits, record them as five-minute clips, and show them to our parents when they came home. It was so much fun."

Although *Second Chance City* is finished, it does not yet have a release date. Cardillo plans to enter the movie in film festivals and, hopefully, win some awards to create some buzz, and then seek a distributor for the movie. The film is off to a good start in that regard, having won a "Best Screenplay Feature" award through the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival.

"If we can win a Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor, whatever, it will generate attention for the film," Cardillo says. "Then we can seek distribution. And if we don't like what we hear from a distributor, we can self-distribute, put the film on various streaming services."

Among Cardillo's forthcoming projects is the launch of Coleco mini-arcade games, coinciding with the 40th anniversary of ColecoVision, of which he is part-owner. As for future film endeavors, Cardillo is adamant about becoming involved only with projects that convey an important social message.

"I remember Bradley Cooper, who's a Philadelphia-area native, saying he'd rather do an independent film for a reduced pay rate that has meaning than audition for one that doesn't," he says. "I feel the same way. The subject matter has to be something that matters." ■