

Red Carpet in Metuchen for 'Blame'

The MDA is working with JuneBug ArtFest to present a red-carpet screening of "Blame," a film shot in Metuchen by Laurie and Quinn Shephard, the youngest filmmaker to show her work at the Tribeca Film Festival. The movie's Nadia Alexander took home the "Best Actress" award from Tribeca, and the film is creating industry buzz with a tale of drama within the drama club of a New Jersey high school.

The Hollywood Reporter wrote that "(Blame)" is sleekly shot and edited, though it's best appreciated as a vehicle for the gifted cast...Nastiness abounds in 'Blame,' but the writer-director brings an empathy to the material — a willingness to locate hidden depths in even the meanest of mean girls — that keeps it from feeling cheap or facile."

A Metuchen High School alum, director/actor Quinn and the cast will be on hand for a Q&A after the film. The event starts at 7 pm on Friday, June 23, at Metuchen High School Auditorium. See www.filmmetuchen.org for more details.



Laurie and Quinn Shephard.

A promotional graphic for Downtown Metuchen. It features a blue background with white diagonal stripes. At the top, there are four circular icons: a car for 'Park', a fork and knife for 'Dine', a shopping bag for 'Shop', and a thumbs up for 'Enjoy'. Below these icons, the text reads: 'Enjoy up to 3 hours of free parking at Pearl Street Parking Deck through August 31st'. At the bottom, there is a logo for 'DOWNTOWN METUCHEN' with the tagline 'explore · experience · enjoy'.

MDA Gathers Main Street Inspiration

Members of the MDA travelled to the Main Street Now conference in Pittsburgh in May to gain inspiration and learn more about best practices for improving downtowns from other towns that have been successful.

Grace Shackney, Jay Muldoon, Robert Russo and Isaac Kremer attended workshops and awards ceremonies and discussed strategies with members of other downtown groups to help determine what initiatives have worked elsewhere and which are best suited for use in Metuchen.

Muldoon, who is a member of Metuchen Borough Council, came away from the experience with a new appreciation for the importance of the MDA's vision and transformation strategy work. He learned that many groups found it more important to focus on business support than special events and festivals.

"We have the luxury of being a start-up without the baggage of running lots of special events," he says. "Our focus has been more on economic vitality and business support and development so we are aligned with the new direction of Main Street America."

One town, in particular, impressed Muldoon.

"Seeing the progress and achievements of the Main Street groups that were recognized at the awards event was really inspiring," he recalls. "The transformation of West Chester, PA, really struck me and made me more confident of achieving a similar transformation for



Rob Russo and Jay Muldoon at the Main Street Now conference in Pittsburgh

Metuchen."

Russo, an artist and graphic designer, represented the Design Team and returned with a renewed appreciation for the historical charm Metuchen has to offer.

"Historical buildings and architectural details hold a lot of cache for a town, so it's important to recognize the details and restore what we can and be respectful with what we cannot," he says.

The best way to think about, and market, Metuchen's downtown is as a product on a shelf competing with similar products, Russo says. Another important takeaway for Russo was that the concept of "design" means a lot more than creating an attractive visual appearance.

"Steve Jobs' quote was 'Design is a funny word. Some people think design means how it looks. But of course, if you dig deeper, it's really how it works,'" Russo says. "This goes a long way in what we are trying to do for this town."

Secret to a Beautiful Downtown? Its Trash

There's one simple thing business owners and residents can do to help beautify downtown: Put their trash in the right place! That's why the MDA has been working with the Department of Public Works and Borough Council on a new policy for removal of garbage and recycling.

The good news is that the need for these policies is a result of the renewed vibrancy of the downtown, which naturally means more trash is being accumulated. The main objective of the new policy is to eliminate, wherever possible, the placement of garbage and recycling in front of buildings on Main Street and throughout the downtown. The policy requires that throughout the downtown district, garbage and recycling from businesses and residential units are to be placed in the rear of the building for pickup by DPW. Garbage can be placed in heavy duty plastic bags or in garbage cans. Recycling materials are to be placed in a container.

Where rear pickup is not possible, garbage and recycling can be placed at the curb in the front of the building or a side street if appropriate. Those buildings will be identified and building owners notified.

Importantly, no garbage from businesses or residents is to be placed in the borough-provided trash receptacles in the downtown district. Those are for use by pedestrians only.

The DPW is expanding its collection schedule in the downtown district and garbage will now be picked up on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday mornings. Recycling will be picked up on Wednesday mornings. Garbage cans or bags are to be placed outside after 6 pm the evening before scheduled pickup. The policy does not apply to buildings and businesses that have dumpsters and private garbage collection. They should continue using their dumpster for garbage and recycling.

Contact the DPW at 732-632-8519 with questions.

ABOUT THE MDA: The Metuchen Downtown Alliance represents more than 250 business owners and 89 property owners and inspired 3,500 volunteer hours last year. DowntownMetuchen.org.



June Promotions

Downtown Takeover – Kids Edition will be held on June 21, 1-6 p.m. Business owners are encouraged to alert the MDA of any offers, specials or other ideas for this promotion. See www.kidsmetuchen.org for more details.

It's not too late to create a JuneBug Grab & Go special. Restaurants are encouraged to create prix fix specials of \$10 to \$20 (including tax) for JuneBug visitors to grab and go as they enjoy this arts festival. See downtownmetuchen.org/junebug-grab-go.

Live Fit Metuchen, a promotion for Metuchen fitness studios, will take place on June 24 from 9 am to 2 pm at the Metuchen Farmer's Market A showcase of some of Metuchen Fitness studios is available at livefitmetuchen.org.



The MDA gifted two Pallet Adirondack Chairs to Old Franklin Schoolhouse. The chairs divert waste from landfills and build community by giving people a place to relax and talk outside a Metuchen landmark.

Capitalizing on Special Events

The MDA created a guide to help downtown merchants benefit from special events that bring thousands of people into town. Among the tips offered are how to "plant the seed" to raise awareness of the event and tell customers about specials that will be offered. Merchants who sell complementary products or services should join forces and pass out fliers or coupons for one another. Contact the MDA for a copy of the full guide with more.