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Detroit aims to enhance city, one project at a time

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By Kelley Dickens

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Aiming for a personal challenge, Detroit rapper Al Nuke wanted to further his creative talents by embarking on the film industry. In 2002 he co-directed the documentary *Street Life*, which received nods from BET. But Al Nuke, whose real name is Curtis Franklin, wanted more.

He wanted to change the city of Detroit with his own film, *17000 Block*, which he wrote, directed and starred in.

The film got its name from the neighborhood where Franklin grew up and where he says he received hands-on education and training. On the city's eastside – 6 Mile and Conant.

It's the story of Buck, a man torn by the streets that raised and nurtured him and truth, which is showing him that the rules of the street can't get you far.

Tortured by memories of a drug-addicted mother and a father devoted to urban warfare, Buck aims to change his life, but must figure out the best way to do it.

Franklin says that many of the movie's elements mirrored his own life.

Funded by Cosa Nostra Entertainment, this independent film held a premiere at the Star Theater Southfield last Thursday.

The film's producer and CEO of Autumn Rain Features, Nicole Sylvester says that originally she wasn't going to take on the project because it wasn't her forte, but Franklin's drive led to change of heart.

"Mostly, I do family dramas, and movies that deal with non-street life instances," she says. "But he was sincere about telling a story. His passion and genuine interest in film making made me change my mind. He was interested in making a movie and not just the fame associated with it," she says.

And Franklin's vision was brought to life with the talents of local actors. Christopher Todd Stewart plays Lock, Buck's street savvy friend. Stewart starred as Kunte Kinte in Wayne County Community College's production of *Roots*.

Theo Williamson played Red, Buck's godfather and Darius Thomas played Buck's strung-out uncle.

Unlike many of his counterparts in the movie, Franklin has had no formal training as an actor but played his role convincingly.

"All it really boils down to is your drive," Franklin says.

Sylvester says during a test screening 70 percent of the audience enjoyed the film and Franklin is pleased with the positive response to the film.

But he thinks that this venture is like a chapter in a book and he wants to start another.

Franklin will release his fifth album *Where Nuke At?* in November. He's shopping around at big labels including, Universal, Cash Money and Interscope to distribute his music worldwide.

But he will not stop making films. He has two more scripts finished — a comedy, *90 Days* and a drama, *Race*.

And Franklin doesn't think he's dreaming too big. He wants to inspire others to do the same.

"People who live in Detroit have been brainwashed to believe that we can only be the working class," Franklin says. "It seems we're scared to challenge ourselves sometimes."

But Franklin says that Detroiters must realize that if no one wants to do something for you, then you must do yourself.

Franklin says that he was the poster child for failure – living in poverty and dropping out of high school – but recognized he had a chance to change.

"You don't have to be a perfect person to do big things," says Franklin.

The film ends on a cliffhanger. But Franklin says that's just the way he wants it.

"Maybe there will be a *17000 Block*, part two," he says.

Curtis Franklin is the CEO of All World Enterprises, located at 11417 Whittier.