



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Spectrum360/FilmAcademy360 to hold its First Outdoor Film Festival featuring Neurodiverse Filmmakers

Livingston, NJ – September 2020 - On September 30th, FilmAcademy360, a program of the nonprofit Spectrum360 serving individuals on the autism spectrum and with related disabilities, will hold its first-ever outdoor film festival, honoring the work of students with autism and other related disabilities. Now in its sixth year, the FilmAcademy360 festival has previously been held indoors at locations such as Montclair State University. With the restrictions due to COVID-19, FilmAcademy360 decided to forgo a virtual event and instead create a "Drive-in movie" experience.

Launched in 2009 under the leadership of Spectrum360 Executive Director Dr. Bruce Ettinger and Program Director David Di Ianni, FilmAcademy360 has dedicated its mission to help neurodiverse individuals learn through filmmaking, video editing, and graphic arts. In 2014, Di Ianni introduced the program's first film festival to showcase his students' works to family and friends and to fundraise for his program. Over the past six years, the annual film festival has included almost 600 attendees, featured over 180 student films, and raised over \$50,000. "This film festival provides our students the opportunity to showcase their abilities to their families and friends and subsequently promotes the importance of inclusion of autism in the broader community," Di Ianni explains. "Neurodiversity is not represented in a creative and positive light in digital media. This festival provides a venue to expose the public to real people with autism in a fun and engaging way."

With financial support from Pfizer and donors including The Gagliardi Family, this year's film festival features 28 short films from 30 different students connected to the theme, "Giving Autism a Voice." Three films, *Sam the Autism Man*, *TVito*, and *Save it for the Show* all use comedy as the vehicle to dispel preconceived notions of autism. The lead actors in these films are also the creators and are on the autism spectrum. Di Ianni and his students will be the host and emcee for the event.

The festival will be held outside on September 30th (rain date: October 2nd), beginning at 7:30 p.m., at 2 Convent Rd, Morristown, NJ 07960. Masks and social distancing will be required. To register for the festival or to donate to FilmAcademy360, please visit our [site](#).

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About FilmAcademy360:

Created by award-winning educator and media producer David Di Ianni, FilmAcademy360 is a unique hands-on educational environment designed to help diverse learners explore and learn through filmmaking, video editing, game creation, and graphic arts. Its after-hours, weekend and summer programs are open to all. The program, which focuses on self-expression and vocational exploration, not only teaches technical skills but also is a place where students can develop confidence, self-esteem and

form social networks. Students engage in their own film festival held every April, create content to become online influencers and work in paid internships at Fortune 500 companies. Many gain certifications, college credit and move into higher education in the field of TV Broadcasting and Digital Media. FilmAcademy360 is the winner of the National Association of Private Special Education Center's 2018 Award in Innovation and Leadership. For more information about Spectrum360 visit us at: <https://spectrum360.org/filmacademy360>

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