International Acclaim for South African Film with Heart

Beyond the River, the 2017 South African film which touched the hearts of South African audiences, will face an international test beyond our borders when it screens in North America later this month. The film, loosely based on the true story of the sporting partnership between Piers Cruickshanks and Siseko Ntondini, was recently nominated in no fewer than 4 categories for the prestigious, local SAFTAs next month, and has been selected for the Sonoma Film Festival, in NorthernCalifornia. The film, produced by South African NGO, Heartlines, tells the story of the experienced and gritty but partly broken Steve (read old white guy) - played by Grant Swanby - and the lion-hearted, rookie-come-upstart from the squatter camp, Duma (read young black guy) and the confluence of their journeys to self-realization.

A South African contingent, led by Executive Producer, Brad Fisher and including Ntondini, Cruickshanks and Ntondini's current racing partner, Zbonelo Khwela will make the journey in the hope of spreading awareness of the film and the social consciousness around it. Ntondini and Khwela, both part of the Adreach/Eurosteel racing team, recently finished a remarkable third in the Dusi Canoe Marathon – the 120km epic canoe race between Pietermaritzburg and Durban.

An extraordinary invitation has been extended to the original duo to present the film to and address the Los Angeles World Affairs Council – an influential and connected audience – on the experience of their involvement in the film and its significance in the South African context.They will join illustrious company – as past speakers in this forum include such influential History as

The film's success comes on the back of a 15-year partnership and social development project led by outdoor media company, Adreach. Ntondini, a long-time beneficiary of the project at just 23 years old says, "our club is not just about sport, it's about the lessons one learns through sport and how to apply it to our education and chosen careers." Fisher, CEO of Adreach and the stalwart behind the Soweto Canoe and Recreation Club initiative insists that these priorities remain paramount in the club's ethos. "We've been through the ups and downs, celebrated the many successes but also had to face disappointments," says Fisher, "and to see the impact that this story has on such a broad spectrum of audiences is just reward for the work, time and support from Adreach over the many years."

The Sonoma Film Festival, now in its 21st year has established its niche in the all-too-saturated American film festival market through its spectacular setting in the attractive winelands of California where the rich and famous own manicured vineyards on the Northern hills above San Francisco, just an hour's flight from Los Angeles (less in your private jet) and that mecca of all film industry meccas: Hollywood.The festival creates an opportunity for the film to gain some international traction – in a slippery and increasingly US-dominated global industry, but also an opportunity to spread the word: a triumphant, good news, South African story in the context of world media currently too much beset with doom and gloom.

Film director, Craig Freimond, recently returned from South Korea where the film was received with standing ovations at the Busan Film Festival, in South Korea – the largest festival in Asia, calls it a "story with heart", "a story of strength and cohesion in diversity" – this, in an increasingly fragmented world of culturally explosive and politically polarized perspectives.

On 23rd March, A day before the film screens in Sonoma, it will open the Vancouver South African Film Festival –a somewhat enigmatic, yet locally lauded and annually supported Canadian event.

To the film-makers and participants in this proudly all South African endeavor: HambaKahle, may the spirit of Ubuntu travel with you in a vapour trail across the Atlantic and beyond!