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Contact: Anita DeAngelis, Mary B. Martin School of the Arts director, 423-439 5673,
deangeli@etsu.edu
Lise Cutshaw, MBM SOTA media & marketing coordinator, 423-773-5410,
cutshaw@etsu.edu

No Love on Valentine Road
Documentary spotlights teen murder causes, repercussions

The Newsweek magazine headline read: “Young, Gay and Murdered.”

At the height of the bullying scandal that rocked the U.S. in 2008, a 15-year-old boy named Lawrence “Larry” King asked another boy to be his valentine in a suburban schoolyard in California. The next day Larry was dead, shot by his 14-year-old crush Brandon McInerney.

The documentary Valentine Road looks deeply into the homophobia, sexism, racism and class-struggle that affect everyday American life – and reveals an American justice system unprepared to deal adequately with teenage crime and punishment.

Mary B. Martin School of the Arts at ETSU will present Valentine Road with filmmaker Marta Cunningham as part of South Arts’ Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers Monday, Oct. 20 at 7 p.m. in Martha Street Culp Auditorium. After the screening, producer and director Cunningham will engage the audience in a discussion about the film and her work as a filmmaker. A reception with the filmmaker will follow the Q&A session. Film and reception are free and open to the public.

At the screening, the School of the Arts will provide a “Memory Board” where viewers can write and post personal experiences with bullying, violence, marginalization and gender or hate crimes.

Valentine Road is Cunningham’s first feature documentary. “I first heard about Lawrence King and the tragic circumstances of his death from a small article in the Southern Poverty Law Center magazine,” Cunningham says. “I was horrified by what I read and wondered how I had not heard about the incident when I lived a mere 45 minutes away.”

The story is difficult, says Anita DeAngelis, director of Mary B. Martin School of the Arts. “It’s really about learning to accept one another and fear of change and the unknown,” DeAngelis says. “One of the things we should be doing on a college campus is providing different sides to a particular argument and teaching students how to sort through all of the media they might see and form opinions that have some validity to them, not just rely on emotional responses.”

Valentine Road has been screened across the country, to positive reviews. “Haunting, heartfelt and even-handed, Valentine Road should be required viewing in teaching tolerance on middle school and high school campuses,” says Claudia Puig of USA Today.
“Moving and infuriating,” says Gary Goldstein of the Los Angeles Times.

“For viewers, Brandon’s action feels tragic and inexcusable. The hard part is how to respond to it, and Valentine Road, like much of ‘the system,’ doesn’t suggest any easy answer,” says David Hinckley of New York Daily News.

Filmmaker Cunningham is an actor turned first-time filmmaker. A native of Northern California, she was so moved by the story of Lawrence King’s murder that she embedded herself in Oxnard and began filming those whose lives were touched by the tragedy. The result became Valentine Road, a feature-length documentary selected to compete in the 2013 Sundance Film Festival and which premiered on HBO in October of 2013.

The Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers is a program of South Arts. Southern Circuit screenings are funded in part by a grant from South Arts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts. South Arts, founded in 1975, is a nonprofit regional arts organization building on the South's unique heritage and enhancing the public value of the arts. Their work responds to the arts environment and cultural trends with a regional perspective through an annual portfolio of activities designed to address the role of the arts in impacting the issues important to its region and linking the South with the nation and the world through the arts.

For information about the film series or ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts, call 423-439-TKTS (8587) or visit www.etsu.edu/martin. Please “Like” ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts on Facebook and follow it on Twitter and Instagram @ArtsAtETSU.