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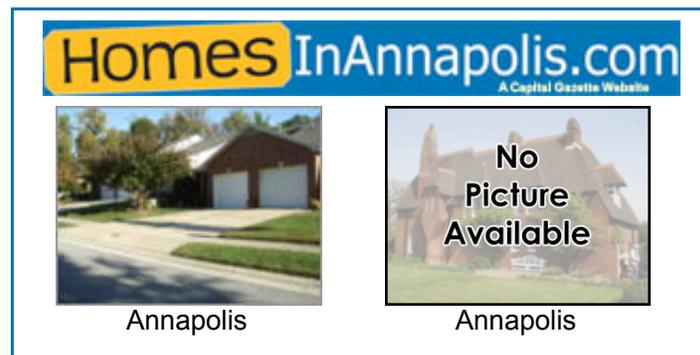
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Eric Harley: Pip, Zastrow and Barack: 50 years of change

By ERIC HARTLEY Staff writer

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Half a century ago, when Roger "Pip" Moyer became the only white player on an Annapolis basketball team that included Joseph "Zastrow" Simms, it was a scandal to some.



The two men became friends after having attended segregated schools, Mr. Moyer the white Annapolis High School and Mr. Simms the black Bates High.

On Saturday, watching the documentary "Pip & Zastrow: An American Friendship" at a screening in Eastport, it was hard not to think about how much has changed.

A racially mixed audience watched the film in a nation whose president, a little more than two months from now, will be Barack Obama, an African-American man whose father was born in Kenya and whose mother was a white woman from Kansas.

It was the first time the movie had been screened in public since the election, and the new context did not escape the filmmakers.

"For me, it's exciting that the history is being told as we are, in fact, making history right now," said Janice Hayes-Williams, an Annapolis historian and a producer of the film.

The film shows the men's friendship over the decades and their role in keeping the peace in the city following the April 4, 1968, assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther

King Jr.

Cities across America burned, but Annapolis did not, thanks in part to Mr. Moyer, the city's young mayor, and Mr. Simms, a small-time crook who was sprung from jail so he could go into black neighborhoods and help his friend talk to people.

The story of their friendship has been talked about in Annapolis ever since; Victoria Bruce, one of the film's directors, kept hearing the story and decided she wanted to tell it.

And in some ways the film, which took about five years to make, is more timely than ever.

"Six years ago in Annapolis, nobody - nobody - would talk about (race)," said Ms. Bruce, recalling fundraising attempts with wealthy white people. "It was the worst subject you could bring up at a cocktail party."

Then the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 opened eyes to lingering poverty in the South, and Mr. Obama's campaign has sparked debates about how much race still matters.

A few blocks from Eastport United Methodist Church, where the movie was shown Saturday, are reminders of what hasn't changed. There are some of the thousands who live in

Annapolis' nearly all-black public housing communities, where too much promise is wasted and too many lives have been lost.

The film spent time on the problems that remain, featuring discussion of the way once-proud neighborhoods of African-American homeowners largely disappeared. Urban renewal was derisively referred to by many as "urban removal."

Still, it's hard to deny the sea change the nation saw two weeks ago.

"To me, it gives everyone the feeling of equality on an intrinsic level," Ms. Bruce said. "There's still social injustice, and there's still a big chasm in many places between races. But I think on an emotional level and an individual level, one can look and say the barriers are not there."

While Mr. Obama's election has many hoping stubborn national race problems might

finally be solved, it might also spur progress in Annapolis, a city where slaves were once sold at the Market House and stark disparities remain.

Ms. Bruce, who lives in Riva, said she's pleased Mr. Simms and Mr. Moyer, both now 74, along with 82-year-old George Phelps - the first African-American law enforcement officer in the county and their film's narrator - lived to see Mr. Obama's election. The three were at Saturday's screening, though Mr. Moyer and Mr. Phelps are in poor health.

If you missed Saturday's showing, "Pip & Zastrow" airs at 10 p.m. tomorrow in an edited form on Maryland Public Television. Its 78-minute running time has been cut to about an hour. And the producers are hoping for a national airing on public television, perhaps next year.

"We've always imagined this film as being a national story," said co-director Karin Hayes, who is no relation to Ms. Hayes-Williams.

In its small way, the documentary could help further a national conversation about how much has changed - and how much hasn't.

Already, it has gotten positive response in Birmingham, Ala., and Memphis, Tenn., cities that were at the center of the civil rights movement. Dr. King was killed in Memphis.

"This country has spoken that enough is enough, and so people are going to be looking more at, 'How did we get here?' " Ms. Hayes-Williams said. "I think that our film helps with that in the context of tomorrow. Look where we've been and look where we can go as a community."

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