

Star TURN

A documentary about Paterson's hot dog grills is one of two projects featuring the city. Coverage starts on page 4





ONE ALL THE WAY is directed by David Baram and produced by his film company 08008 Productions. Baram is a Paterson native, who has built an impressive career in Hollywood, guiding the careers of some of the biggest names in entertainment and producing some of the biggest hit TV series in history.

GRILLS OF PATERSON

A new documentary highlights the city's hot dog history

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Baram

For his directorial debut, David Baram returned home to Paterson to tell the story of the hot Texas wiener and its roots in the Silk City. Baram was born and raised in Paterson before moving to Los Angeles where he has built a career in the entertainment industry. He served as President and COO of The Firm, a leading talent management and production company whose clients included Leonardo DiCaprio, Cameron Diaz, Justin Timberlake, Criss Angel, and many more.

In 2008, The Firm split into two groups, including, LBI Entertainment, of which Baram was a co-founder. The name is an ode to the Jersey Shore area where Baram has a summer home in Surf City. In addition, he was the executive producer for more than 100 episodes of "Criss Angel: Mindfreak."

While Baram continues serving in the management and production side of the entertainment business, he had the creative bug to tell his own stories. And so he made "One All the Way" a documentary about the hot Texas wiener grills he frequented as a kid with his father, Harry, who stars in the film along with his two friends, Ron Rauschart and Larry Presta.

"This film really was my effort to start producing and directing things that were my own vision," Baram said. "It

was a story I wanted to tell. It's going to sound crazy, but I've been thinking about this for 30 years."

At the heart of the film is the trio, who regularly go on hot dog crawls visiting the best hot dog joints in Jersey. The movie, filmed over three days in January 2020 just before COVID-19 changed life as we know it, follows the three friends as they revisit their hometown of Paterson in their quest to find the infamous hot Texas wiener.

A hot Texas wiener "all the way," which originated in Paterson, is a deep fried hot dog topped with mustard, onions, and a chili-like sauce, with recipes that are guarded and treated as state secrets. "At my funeral, what I planned with my wife is that I would have a hot Texas wiener in my hand," Dave's father, Harry, says in the film, "and as people pass by my casket, there would be a table set up and you'd be able to have a hot dog, but it must have hot Texas wiener sauce."

The grills, as they are called, that serve hot Texas wieners first catered to factory shift workers in the early 20th century, when Paterson stood as one of most important industrial cities in the United States. Over the years, the concept of hot Texas wiener grills spread to other parts of North Jersey, often with deep ties and connections to each other, almost like a family tree, from menus to recipes to employees to the business model.

Because of the tight-knit community aspect of the grills, Baram said, initially, many were reluctant to participate in the documentary to avoid being ranked and compared against each other. Once they realized that was not the premise, the grills were eager to tell and



ONE ALL THE WAY explores the history of hot Texas wiener joints in Paterson.

share their stories and connections to each other and, of course, Paterson.

As the trio began visiting and meeting with owners from some of the legendary grills, such as the Hot Grill in Clifton, Goffle Grill in Hawthorne, Johnny & Hanges, formerly in Paterson and now in Fair Lawn, and the recently shuttered Libby's in Paterson, the storyline quickly evolved and twined with more broad issues like aging, abandonment, isolation and nostalgia.

Baram said he wanted to make sure people understood that the documentary was about more than just a hot dog. "The crawl is sort of an excuse, or the lens, through which we tell the story of Paterson and the grills," Baram explained. "A hot dog is the vehicle through which we're touching upon some universal issues that, I think, probably are experienced in myriad communities around the country."

And as he takes the documentary through the festival circuit, Baram has seen audiences connecting with those broader themes. "Even though it's a small story, in some ways, about this micro-delicacy found in Paterson, New Jersey," Baram said, "I think it touches upon a lot of universal themes of aging, of economic decline that cities throughout the country are experiencing despite the booming economy that the country has experienced overall. It deals with issues of friendship."

While the film expresses love and respect for Paterson and its history, it also examines why this once vibrant city has faced such a steep economic decline, how it has affected the grills and whether it can rise again. Baram is hopeful the documentary, which is garnering awards and buzz at festivals, can bring some positive attention to his home city.

"Even if this just does a tiny bit of a job to shine some light on both the challenges and the promise of a place like Paterson, then I feel like we had a very tiny, but positive impact," Baram said. "It's got such a really fascinating history that, unfortunately, so few people are familiar with."



The film's subjects lament that Paterson, America's first industrial center and once one of its most important, now ranks among the nation's poorest cities.

OUT TO THE BALLPARK

Mayor Andre Sayegh is at the heart of efforts to help put Paterson back on the map by making people more familiar with its history and story. Sayegh was elected mayor in 2018 at a particularly fraught time in the city, after two of the previous three mayors, Martin Barnes and Joey Torres, went to jail on corruption charges.

So, before Sayegh, who previously served on the Paterson school board and city council, could move the ball forward, he first had to help restore credibility and improve the city's reputation. One initiative to achieve that goal was rebranding Paterson around its greatest assets, the Great Falls, along with its culture and food.

A contest was held where the winning slogan chosen was "Great Falls, Great Food, Great Future." The new logo featured a picture of the historic Great Falls, where a major redevelopment is underway to make it a centerpiece of Paterson, with a park and visitors center, named after city founder Alexander Hamilton, funded in part by \$130 million in state tax credits.

"There's tremendous potential in Paterson, so many assets we can leverage," Sayegh said.

Another such asset is the legendary Hinchliffe Stadium, which drew attention in the film when the trio of hot dog crawlers visited the dilapidated ballpark, which is one of the last two standing Negro League venues. The stadium served as a reminder of what once was. But Sayegh was determined to help resurrect the legendary field, where Paterson native Larry Doby once starred.

And in April, Sayegh was joined by local leaders, real estate executives, and high-profile sports figures, such as CC Sabathia, Harold Reynolds, Omar Minaya and Willie Randolph, to break ground on a new \$94 million mix-use redevelopment. The project will feature a 12,000 square-foot restaurant and event space, and a 7,800-seat athletic facility that the mayor hopes will be New Jersey's own Field of Dreams.

"Hinchliffe Stadium is the largest catalytic investment in a generation," Sayegh said. "By taking one of our most dormant and underutilized sites with deep historic significance, we are laying the foundation for city-wide reinvestment and opportunity. We are witnessing a once-in-a-lifetime transformation and I'm proud of our public-private partners who have helped usher in this complex project."

Sayegh has often doubled as Paterson's head cheerleader and chief promoter. That role was on full display during a phone interview with NJBIZ when Barstool Sports Founder Dave Portnoy, coincidentally, arrived in the city to taste and score pizzas as part of his popular One Bite segment. Sayegh quickly joined Portnoy for a slice and took him on an impromptu tour of the city, turning the encounter into an opportunity to promote the city's assets and sites. The two-part video, jokingly titled "Bonus Kidnapping by Paterson Mayor," has been viewed several hundred thousand times.

When Sayegh jumped back on the interview, he said the experience was just another example that Paterson is picking up and drawing more interest.

Another part of Sayegh's effort to raise Paterson's profile has been opening the door to the film industry. Aaron Sorkin recently used the city as a backdrop to film the "Trial of the Chicago 7," as did Steven Spielberg with his upcoming production of "West Side Story," which will be released later this year. David Chase chose to film parts of the upcoming Sopranos prequel, "The Many Saints of Newark," in Paterson.

The city was also used to film parts of "The Irishman," directed by Martin Scorsese, who is represented by Baram's LBI Entertainment. In fact, Baram's experience making "One All the Way" convinced him to move a project scheduled to shoot in New York later this year instead to New Jersey.

"It's just been nice to reconnect in a very meaningful way with New Jersey," Baram said.



The hot Texas wiener is a deep-fried concoction made famous in Paterson.

Baram and Sayegh are discussing the possibility of holding a screening for the documentary in Paterson. Baram expects the film to find a streaming home later this year after completing the festival circuit, where its being very well-received.

"One All the Way" premiered at the Garden State Film Festival in March. Since then, it has been invited to more than a dozen prestigious festivals, including several Oscar-qualifying events, around the country and won "Best Short Documentary" at the Julien Dubuque International Film Festival, as well as the Sarasota Film Festival.

"It's just being really well-received and far beyond Jersey," Baram said. "Which is awesome to be able to share this story with folks that aren't familiar with Paterson, or certainly, aren't familiar with the hot Texas wiener."

Sayegh is excited about the documentary, which he has heard nothing but positive feedback about. "It hits people in the heart and in the stomach," Sayegh said.

"This film is my love letter to all the mom-and-pop diners who created lifelong memories for me," Baram said. "It's a labor of love. It's not only an ode to Paterson and the hot Texas wiener grills, but to my dad."

Sayegh welcomes the opportunity it brings for Paterson to take centerstage in front of a potential global audience. "Paterson is the city where Hamilton set the stage," Sayegh said. "Now, the city's ready for its next act."