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'Crossroads in Nihonmachi'

1 Dec 2006

Breaking News!

“Crossroads in Nihonmachi” is a video documentary on one of the most controversial periods in San Francisco’s Japanese American history when forced redevelopment impacted over 4,000 families.

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Second in significance only to the forced evacuations of World War II, it was a time when friendships were fragmented and homes and businesses lost, driven by social and economic decisions made by external interests and the city’s Redevelopment Agency.

“Crossroads in Nihonmachi” will have its long-awaited premiere screening on Saturday, Dec. 16, at 6 p.m. at the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, 1840 Sutter St., San Francisco. The showing will be followed by a Q&A session with directors Adrienne Anderson and Tony Sondag along with executive producer Boku Kodama. While the event is free, reservations can be made by e-mail at [info \[at\] urbanvoice.org](mailto:info@urbanvoice.org) or by calling (510) 655-1304.

In the early '70s, Nihonmachi was facing the final stages of its controversial makeover from a residential and small business community into a tourist destination as drawn into the city’s Master Plan. What was once a thriving community of some 30 blocks was now down to four. Yet the significance of this era was the rise of a community fighting back and demanding participation in its own destiny.

Now, during this 100th anniversary of the community’s heritage, controversy and disruption have once again arisen as the largest property changeover since the '70s has taken place.

“Crossroads” is the story of the community told through three dozen voices, all wanting to save Japantown but differing in their solutions. While the original intent was to tell the story of a divided community of 30 years ago, 3D Investments’ purchase of Kintetsu’s properties this year made it imperative that the film incorporate this latest episode to show the similar dynamics of the two periods.

The project has taken nearly two years to complete with hundreds of hours of filming and over 10,000 photographs and films gathered and archived, much of which have never been seen in a public venue. Part of the reason for the extended completion time was that the team of videographers, writers and support staff contributed to the project as volunteers.

“Our costs in producing this documentary was under \$100,000,” said Kodama. “Had it been done as a for-profit project, it would easily have cost a million. I believe this project was the most meticulous and ambitious effort in telling this crucial history of San Francisco.”

In addition to the volunteers, most of the old photos, film and music were donated by a wide sector of the community, including individuals, community organizations and the Redevelopment Agency.

“We had an amazing response from the community,” said Anderson. “This project really struck a nerve with many people, and their participation and contributions are what make this documentary so compelling and important.”

Sondag agreed. “This project is the story of an American people that fought through the adversities of racism, exploitation and exclusionism. Their triumph is the story of America.”

Orders for the one-hour documentary on DVD will be made available to the public for \$24.95 plus \$3 shipping. Special discounts for educational institutions will be available. The release date for the DVD is mid-February 2007.

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