

PRESS RELEASE
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Mill Neck Students' Video More than Just Music

“I wish I had something like this growing up; when I see what my team and I do for these kids, it goes beyond anything I’ve ever done,” says hip-hop artist Sean Forbes, referring to the recent two-day music video workshop he and several members of his non-profit organization, D-PAN conducted at Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf. Forbes, who is Deaf, channels his passion for music into his outreach to the Deaf community via American Sign Language (ASL) videos, workshops and music camps.

The Detroit-based D-PAN, The Deaf Professional Artists Network (www.deafandloud.com), was co-founded by Forbes in 2006. The organization focuses on translating popular songs into ASL music videos for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. Additionally, Forbes and his team of musicians encourage musical expression via hands-on involvement through the music video workshops D-PAN offers.

In creating a music video with the high school students at Mill Neck’s Deaf Education Center (DEC), the goal for D-PAN was the same for any of their workshops. They provided guidance in all phases of the video’s production; from pre-production planning, art directing, and operating equipment, to post-production editing using professional software. Otherwise, the professionals let the students take over, effectively encouraging the kids to make the project their own. From various assignments in their required Broadcasting class, the DEC students are familiar with video equipment and are comfortable in front of the camera. They did, however, display a heightened level of responsibility throughout the D-PAN project.

Katie Kerzner, the DEC’s Principal, concurs, citing two examples. “One student, who is normally a very quiet young man, exhibited a new sense of leadership in his role as the director. He was very outgoing. Another student was responsible for announcing the takes during production. He showed a tremendous amount of focus with this job. He never missed the cues, and we were wonderfully surprised, given his difficulty in the past with maintaining focus,” Kerzner says. She stressed that a lot of work was put in even before D-PAN arrived. Students (and staff) spent time watching the video of the song “Shut Up and Dance” and began translating the lyrics to ASL. The students went on to create the actual video in just two days’ time. Kerzner

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says, “I firmly believe this was a life changing experience for our students. They came to me afterward and said, ‘now we know how to make a music video, we want to make our own.’”

And the feedback from the Mill Neck student videographers? “Amazing!” to “Wow!” were a couple of initial reactions. Overall, in addition to enjoying the experience, students expressed how inspired they were by Forbes and D-PAN. While the D-PAN team was, according to one student, “Awesome rappers,” others also found them encouraging and approachable. At least two students said they’d consider careers in filming and video editing. Even when some of the tasks proved trying, like having to do scenes over and over, as mentioned by one of the lead actors, the experience was “pretty awesome.”

Although the videos D-PAN produces are essentially geared toward the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, the hearing population is also expressing a growing interest in ASL translations of popular songs. Since 2008, Forbes has performed in over 40 cities nationwide, including colleges, concert venues and retailers.

Forbes says, “We need more things like this across the country, when we come in and empower these students. We tell them the same things their teachers tell them. They seem to accept it more from people that look like they’re crazy, but we really love what we do and we love sharing it. We had an amazing time at Mill Neck and hope to come back in the future!” The Mill Neck Manor community would hope so too.

The Mill Neck Family of Organizations includes Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, founded by Lutheran Friends of the Deaf in 1947, the Mill Neck Manor Early Childhood Center, Mill Neck Services, Mill Neck Interpreter Service, Mill Neck Audiology and Lutheran Friends of the Deaf. For information on programs and services, please call 516-922-4100 or visit millneck.org.

Photo Captions:

1. Mark Levan of D-PAN offers camera guidance to a student.
2. Mill Neck students Sabrina, Karina and Janelle clearly enjoyed being part of the D-PAN experience.
3. Sean Forbes, in the center, and the rest of the D-PAN crew, “had an amazing time at Mill Neck!”
4. Nancy Leghart, Mill Neck’s Director of Advancement, is seen with D-PAN members (from left) Sean Forbes, Mark Levan and Adrean Mangiardi. On the turntables in back is D-PAN deejay Robbie Wilde.





