

Hollywood actor writes screenplay about Soap Box Derby

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One of the stars of the movie *Major League* and television show *L.A. Law* is hoping to come to the rescue of the All-American Soap Box Derby

Actor Corbin Bernsen has written a screenplay with a central story line about the iconic Akron event that dates back to the Great Depression. He hopes his work will shed light on the race and help it financially.

The movie, to be called *25 Hill*, is about an 11-year-old boy named Trey who dreams of winning the All-American.

When Trey's father is killed in Afghanistan, his dreams are shattered, but then are rebuilt with the help of a one-time derby champion, described in a press release as a "reluctant hero" who is "contending with his own terrible heartbreak."

In the film, the boy and the former derby winner become friends, but their "hopes are threatened when the Derby's demise appears imminent," a press release said.

Jim Huntsman, chief executive of the All-American, said he got a call from Bernsen in September after the actor had read an article in USA Today about the financial plight of the derby.

"We started discussing his concept," Huntsman said.

When the script was finished, Bernsen sent a copy to Huntsman. The two have been talking off and on for the past few months.

"It is very well done," Huntsman said about the script.

Bernsen said he believes "we need to fight for America right now. By this I don't mean go to war, but fight for ourselves and our own survival and those things within our own borders."

He said he believes "we can't lose our traditions, and the Soap Box Derby is as American, simple and exciting as any tradition we have. It's where kids dare to dream."

The All-American has been struggling financially. It has lost money in three of the past five years and even has lost its line of credit.

Earlier this year, the derby was looking at losing \$200,000, but Huntsman said it is possible the organization might be "close to breaking even this year."

This year was the second year the organization did not have a title sponsor.

Huntsman said the organization has not finalized any type of contract or licensing agreement with Bernsen, but "what we've discussed is the derby would receive a percentage of box receipts."

"We are struggling financially like everyone else," Huntsman said.

The organization, he said, hopes any film that is made "sheds light that we need corporate sponsors, but also it sheds light on the value of the program."

The derby is now in the process of trying to reinvent itself and focus on its "green" or environmentally friendly aspects, Huntsman said. Officials also hope to develop an "educational program focused on math and science applications inherent on gravity racing."

In recent months, Huntsman said the All-American has been approached by other cities that would like to host the annual event, but "we've been in Akron for more than 70 years. We certainly don't want to go anywhere else."

Huntsman said the All-American brings in from \$1.5 million to \$1.7 million to the local economy each year.

The name *25 Hill* comes from a hill in Taft, Calif., where Bernsen's mother, actress Jeanne Cooper, grew up. The movie takes place in Taft and in Akron.

Bernsen would like Toby Keith to provide the soundtrack, the press release said.

25 Hill is a venture of Bernsen's Team Cherokee Productions, an independent film company. Investors are being sought to raise the film's budget of less than \$1 million, Bernsen said.