

Actor Corbin Bernsen producing movie to help save Akron's soap box derby

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Getty ImagesCorbin Bernsen

AKRON, Ohio -- Actor Corbin Bernsen, of "Major League" fame, promoted a film project Saturday that he hopes will help save the **All American Soap Box Derby**, a Rubber City institution facing money problems.

Bernsen planned to meet with potential investors this weekend to help fund production of "25 Hill," a movie about a boy whose interest in soap box racing coincides with a family tragedy.

The actor is hoping the movie will raise money and renew interest in the derby to help it survive.

"Movies have this incredible ability to start trends and bring awareness quickly," the 55-year-old father of four boys said during an interview in his Akron hotel room.

Bernsen's interest in the derby began last fall when he read a newspaper article about financial struggles threatening the derby, which was born in 1933 when a Dayton newspaperman drew inspiration from a trio of local boys he saw racing their own home-built cars on a city street.

The derby, which has lacked a corporate sponsor for the past three seasons, **has lost money two out of the last five years**, and barely broke even last year, according to derby officials.

Bernsen, who lives in Los Angeles, thought it was an American tradition worth saving.

He decided to write a screenplay for a movie highlighting the Akron event. Locations in Akron and Cleveland will be used for most of the filming, which is to begin in April. The budget will be less than \$1 million.

Although he's never built a soap box derby car, Bernsen said almost everyone shares the childhood fascination of trying to build some type of vehicle with wood and some wheels -- a go-cart, a scooter or a skateboard.

Bernsen will direct the movie and likely will have an acting role. But he's not sure how it will be released. "My ego's not into having it on a big screen," he said. "I have no problem getting it on TV and selling DVDs."

Aside from producing movies, Bernsen currently plays a retired cop on "**Psych**," a program on **USA Network**.

But one of his most memorable roles was as Roger Dorn, a prima donna third baseman in "**Major League**," a 1989 comedy classic about an underdog Cleveland Indians team. Bernsen said his portrayal of Dorn gets him recognized across the country more than any other role, including his turn as **Arnie Becker** on "**L.A. Law**."

"I'm surprised because I'm 15 pounds heavier and have no hair," he joked.