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Weekend screenings have Annapolis ties

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Local actor and archivist Chris Haley has been busy creating his own version of Utopia - the fourth annual Utopia Film Festival.

The three-day event this weekend at venues in Greenbelt and College Park showcases more than 40 films spanning a wide range of topics, including several with ties to Annapolis. The screenings kick off Friday night and run through Sunday evening.

For example, one of the documentaries, "Yokes and Chains," which is about the legacy of slavery, contains footage of the 2004 reconciliation walk in Annapolis, said Mr. Haley, who serves as director of the festival and is the nephew of "Roots" author Alex Haley.

In addition, the short film "Dream Girl" is the work of 2004 Annapolis High School graduate Michael Vincent.

Mr. Vincent, a full-time filmmaker who now lives in New York City, said he's planning to travel here for the festival and is looking forward to being back home. "I can't wait," he said.

"Dream Girl" explores the conflict between the natural world and material things, said Mr. Vincent, who will be shooting footage in the St. Margarets area for another project while he's in the area.

Annapolis resident Melissa Danielson will conduct a question-and-answer session, as well as discuss her own issues dealing with bipolar and generalized anxiety disorders, following the screening of "Canvas," a film about a woman's mental illness and how it impacts her family.

The film, which will be screened in conjunction with the Prince George's County chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness, stars well-known performers Marcia Gay Harden and Joe Pantoliano.

"I just screened the movie and it's wonderfully done," said Ms. Danielson, who serves on the board of the Anne Arundel County chapter of NAMI. "I love anything that gets people talking about mental illness and gets (the issues) out into the open."

Other movies in the festival cover subjects as diverse as New Deal pioneers in Alaska



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and the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. Some are foreign films, including two shorts by an 8-year-old Mexico City boy, and will have subtitles. The majority of the movies are documentaries, though other genres are covered, including animation.

Some of the titles are: "At Home in Utopia," a documentary about four co-op apartment complexes in the Bronx in the 1920s; "The Big Q," a short about the perfect way to propose marriage; "In the Panyard," a documentary about a U.S. music student who studies steel drums in Trinidad; and "Shikashika," a short documentary about a family that takes ice from the Andes to make snow cones in the city.

"Whether you're 5, 25 or 55, there is a movie in this festival which you will find yourself talking about and remembering for years to come," said Mr. Haley, who serves as director of the Study of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland at the state archives. "You will leave here with knowledge and a joy you probably won't have experienced before."

For more information about the Utopia Film Festival, including a list of films and screening locations, visit the Web site at www.utopiafilmfestival.org. Tickets can be purchased online or at the door.

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