

Film review: “100 Signatures”

New documentary focuses on barriers to access in the electoral system

By Steve Welzer

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Six years ago Dean and Nicole Greco of Raritan Township, NJ wanted to urge “just folks” to actively participate in the electoral process. They decided to make a documentary film showing how an independent campaign can be run without an inordinate commitment of time or money. Dean set out to obtain the 100 signatures needed to get his name on the ballot to run for the House of Representatives in his district as the “nominee” of his own Breakfast-All-Day Party. This might sound frivolous, but the filmmakers wanted to avoid association with any existing party, group, or issue, feeling they might limit the usefulness of the documentary if it was suspected that they had a particular axe to grind. They wanted to portray a “generic” experience . . . and also mix in a little humor and fun for the sake of audience appeal.

“We started out intending to simply document an independent campaign as a how-to guide—here’s a look at how the system works,” says Nicole. “But over the course of our research we had the opportunity to understand that, while it may be simple enough for a school teacher in New Jersey to get on the ballot with 100 signatures, it’s very, very different across the country. In Georgia, for example, you need tens of thousands of signatures. In New Jersey there’s a very low filing fee, but in other states it can be many thousands of dollars. People went to jail in 2007 in Oklahoma for petitioning to get someone on the ballot as an independent candidate. If we are in a representative democracy, why do voters get to have more choice in one state than another?”

So after starting the film as a local project they wound up going coast to coast, interviewing other candidates and election law experts (including Green-friendly activists Theresa Amato and Richard Winger). The ultimate message conveyed is that the two dominant parties have deliberately passed exclusionary laws and established idiosyncratic rules to limit access to the electoral system. Such barriers to entry would never be condoned in the world of commerce; they certainly should not be tolerated in the electoral arena.

Third-party and independent candidates would be well-advised to make the screening of this professional, engrossing, and entertaining documentary a staple of their campaigns. The imperative message to *open up our electoral system* must be expressed in every possible media . . . and now it’s the focus of an excellent new film.

“100 Signatures” was shown at the Downbeach Film Festival in Atlantic City in October, 2013 and will be submitted to other festivals.

Written and directed by: Dean Greco, Nicole Lieb Greco

Production Company: Focus On The Good

Runtime: 91 min

<http://www.100signatures.com>