

Seeing The Drug Scene Up Close

By Jacqueline Hammel

Del Mar resident Lee Harvey was thoroughly submerged in the subculture of drugs. Her life was filled with dealers, addicts, police officers, judges, doctors and rehab centers. A grim experience that seems incongruous with her soft spoken, gentle demeanor. No, she wasn't a member of the lamentable drug underground, she was researching the local scene for her documentary, "Methamphetamine: Streets of San Diego," which aired on KPBS television in January.

The award-winning, independent producer was inspired to produce the program after learning that San Diego had long been considered the "meth capital" of the nation. The program examines the history of methamphetamine use and distribution, from its introduction to the military in World War II to its current epidemic status. The documentary also covers recent San Diego tragedies that were meth related.

The real focus of the program, however, is the drug's ability to destroy human lives, "the users were very willing to help tell the story," Harvey said. A 19-year-old recovering addict and a former meth cooker bravely share their experiences with methamphetamine; these chilling, intimate portraits depict people one can relate to- they look like "the guy next door."

No city is immune from meth. It is inexpensive and easy to produce, many meth labs are in residential neighborhoods. Harvey confirms that it is widely, and easily available. Exposure to the drug comes early, at an age rife with insecurity and pres-

sure- almost every student she spoke with "sees it in junior high."

Harvey produced the show with a clear purpose, "to get through to the gated communities where people shut this out." Based on the show's impressive ratings, Harvey's message hit home, over 65,000 San Diego households tuned in. Del Mar residents got the message loud and

clear, and have asked Harvey to share her knowledge about the problem with Del Mar schools and civic groups. She is pleased that the community is taking an active role and commends local coalitions such as the Meth Strike Force for their ongoing involvement with the cause.

Harvey is enjoying a brief respite from the intense year spent producing the documentary. She is considering future projects, possibly documentary or educational films about HIV. Drawn to the human drama of her subjects-the compelling nature of struggle and triumph- she is concerned about the decline in HIV awareness. "The disease has changed, it's more resilient, and the education is dropping off." You can be certain that Lee Harvey will do something to change that. To obtain a video of "Methamphetamine: Streets of San Diego," call the KPBS Distribution Center at 800-266-5727.



Lee Harvey

photo by: Jacqueline Hammel