

# Filmmakers tackle blacks and suicide

BY LAYLA GARMS  
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem native Kenneth Todd Nelson is sounding the alarm about a problem that he says is claiming the lives of too many black men.

The actor/model is stepping behind the camera for the forthcoming documentary film "Face of Darkness," which tackles depression and suicide and the impact suffering in silence is having on African American men and those who love them. A seven minute public service announcement for the film premiered Thursday, Feb. 20. It is the first phase of the "Face of Darkness" project, which is currently seeking financial support via the crowd-funding site [indiegogo.com](http://indiegogo.com).

Nelson, a Carver High School alumnus who lives in New York City, said the project was inspired by a personal brush with tragedy.

"I lost a friend. His name was Lee Thompson Young. He committed suicide about five months ago," said Nelson, who, along with Squeaky Moore, is directing and co-producing "Face of Darkness."

Young, a Columbia, S.C. native who was best known for playing the title role in The Disney Channel's "The Famous Jett Jackson," died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in August. The actor had a history of bipolar disorder and depression, according to news reports. Young was 29, the same age as Nelson.

"When I found out about it, it kind of did something to me," Nelson said. "It kind of shook me to my core."

Too many African American men's lives have been cut short by suicide — as evidenced by the loss of Soul Train host Don Cornelius, hip hop mogul



Filmmakers Kenneth Todd Nelson and Squeaky Moore look over footage.

Chris Lighty and Hampton University alumnus Yusuf Neville, who jumped to his death from a hotel parking deck in Greensboro last month — Nelson says. African Americans seek help for depression less often than those of other races. Studies suggest that black men are most hesitant to seek help and consider therapy unmanly and for the weak.

"It's a cycle," said Nelson, who, in his youth, trained under N.C. Black Rep Founder Larry Leon Hamlin. "They (society) teach us at a very young age to be strong. 'Don't cry like a little girl.' They teach us not to express ourselves, and that's the worst thing that you can do."

Nelson, the father of a nine year-old son, has fought his own battles with depression, beginning with the loss of his mother in 2004.

"She had been sick for years, but it was very sudden," he related. "She died on Valentine's Day, which was very traumatic for me, because we were very close."

Like many who suffer



Young

from depression, Nelson says he didn't recognize the severity of his situation until years later, when the turmoil he was experiencing on the inside took on a physical manifestation.

"One day, I was lying on the couch, and the whole left side of my body went numb," he said. "...I actually thought I was having a stroke or something. I was scared because my body was doing things that I had no control over at the moment."

Nelson sought medical help, but was surprised to learn that what ailed him was an outward sign of a deep depression.

"I didn't realize I was suffering in silence," he confessed. "...You would see me smiling all the time, and people would never know that something was wrong. I think I was hiding my pain behind my smile because I didn't want people to know that I was hurting."

"Face of Darkness" will eventually include a comprehensive Web site and the full-length documentary, which is slated to be completed later this year. The film will follow three men's real-life journeys from depression back to sound mental health. The goals of both the film and web site are to provide a wealth of information and resources to help viewers recognize the signs and tackle the problem as effectively as possible.

Chicago native Moore, who says she too has dealt with bouts of depression, hopes the project will offer a platform that will open the lines of communication and incite conversations about the subject of depression.

"That's why for Kenneth and I it's become so important to get people to talk and to share stories on film," said Moore, a mother of one who holds an MFA in theater from Roosevelt University. "... We need them to have that 'come to Jesus' moment in front of the camera where everyone can see, 'I'm not alone.'"

Both filmmakers said that when they began opening up about their own mental health struggles, they were surprised to find many of their friends were also grappling with similar issues.

Nelson says working on the project has had a therapeutic effect.

"This whole process is helping me to heal — this is part of my healing process, to be honest with you," he declared. "Something that was once pain, I have turned it into power."

The filmmakers are currently seeking funding to complete the documentary at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/face-of-darkness-documentary>. Watch the PSA and learn more about the project at <https://www.facebook.com/FACEOFDARKNESS-DOCUMENTARY>.

The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co. Inc., 617 N. Liberty Street, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101. Periodicals postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
The Chronicle, P.O. Box 1636  
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-1636

## NCDOT needs help with potholes

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The deluge of potholes left in the wake of the recent rash of winter weather is being aggressively attacked by the N.C. Department of Transportation, officials say.

Because potholes can quickly form without warning, NCDOT is urging motorists to pay special attention to the roadway and be on the lookout for potholes.

Motorists can also help the department by reporting potholes. If you see a pothole on a state-maintained road, report it to NCDOT at 1-877-368-4968, or online at [www.ncdot.gov/contact](http://www.ncdot.gov/contact). Click on "County Contacts" on the left of your screen and then choose the county. The email form will be sent to the local NCDOT office.

To help crews locate the pothole, be sure to provide as much information as possible about its location, including the city or county, road name, nearest intersection, which lane the pothole is in, and the size and depth of the pothole. If a pothole is in a work zone, the contractor will be notified and is responsible for fixing it. You should contact your local municipality to report a pothole on a road that is not maintained by NCDOT.



More than \$3 billion for education over the last seven years. That's right. Together, North Carolinians have added classrooms, funded Pre-K programs, sent kids to college, kept teachers teaching and helped schools have more of the technology they need. This year alone, \$478 million was contributed to the \$10 billion NC education budget. To see what the money has done in your community, visit [WeAllDidThis.com](http://WeAllDidThis.com).



Must be 18 to play.