

**AFI DALLAS**  
International Film Festival  
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## Pete Schuermann of HAZE digs into his doc on drinking

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By [Lisa McFadden Whaley](#)  
Special to the Daily News



Inspired by the death of Gordie Bailey in 2004, [HAZE](#) delivers a compelling message and an alarming look at the death and destruction brought about from binge drinking and hazing incidents on college campuses throughout the US. Executive produced by Gordie's mother and stepfather, Leslie and Michael Lanahan, and directed by Pete Schuermann, HAZE is a feature documentary containing interviews with 35 experts on the topic, in addition to personal conversations with Gordie's family members and his friends attending college at a variety of universities.

Schuermann was approached by the Lanahans and the Gordie Foundation to direct the film after they had seen his previous work concerning a hazing incident that resulted in the death of Scott Krueger on the campus of MIT.

"During the discussion with them on creative avenues and hearing of the many ties they already had to experts in this field, I had suggested that we produce an actual documentary centering on Gordie Bailey's tragic death, but also utilizing the many expert testimonials to round out the "big picture" of this epidemic situation," says Schuermann.

### [HAZE](#)

**4:30 pm** Friday, March 27th Landmark's Magnolia

**3:15 pm** Saturday, March 28th Landmark's Magnolia

Unlike other documentaries speaking on similar subjects, HAZE is a front row seat at a campus party. "Our attitude in making HAZE was to show the situation with alcohol abuse in academia today, not just tell it," says Schuermann. The filmmakers keep the pacing in the film with the use of their own footage created on ride-alongs with police and EMTs, and also with the use of the student's own contributions on YouTube. "Gaining access to parties, frank discussion from those deep in the middle of the problem—the students themselves—and in general showing the tragic consequences first hand was a daunting task... due mostly to refused permission."

He adds: "Interestingly, though my initial feeling was that this was a cinematic 'cheat,' YouTube and many other online resources provided an abundance of b-roll sources. It seemed some people were quite coy having a second-party capture drunken antics on camera, but postings by the individuals themselves were more common and (seemingly) comfortable. We have since achieved some critical acclaim for "speaking" to a generation through the "brilliant" use of these contemporarily relevant online videos, but the reality was that was a last resort in our minds."

The best part of making this documentary according to Schuermann was the "rush" received while on ride-alongs. He said, "Though it was hard to witness first-hand just how severe these drinking fests can get, and there was plenty of violence, blood and frankly put, ridiculous, loss-of-faith-in-humanity inducing behavior, no experience during the making of HAZE would endure in memory with such exhilaration." He also feels for the most part that he achieved what he set out to do in making this documentary, as it has touched people's lives and made a difference in them.

Schuermann had this to add for those looking to make their own documentaries, "No matter how interesting your topic may be, you need to be a good storyteller to command attention... It means being aware of your audience, being aware of where they might be in the process of hearing your story. Do your fact-finding and documenting, then structure your story. My personal experience suggests that having a story you want to tell derives itself from the research phase, not vice versa.

"There are many aspects of HAZE that are wholly different than the expectation of where we began. I learned to wait and be patient and see what the facts presented, rather than looking for the facts I needed to bring my initial expectation to life."