

New Jersey

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by Ashley J. Cerasaro

Documentary filmmaker Vic Losick says he is “always looking for a good story.” The Tenafly native found one right in New Jersey.

The real-life story began in 2006 when Matthew LaClair, then a student at Kearny High School, secretly taped his history teacher, David Paszkiewicz, in class. LaClair accused him of proselytizing for Jesus. To the horror of the national media, members of the local school board and many residents of the Hudson County town defended Paszkiewicz, who argued he was exercising academic freedom.

“This is a very New Jersey, very Kearny-centric story, but it has national implications,” Losick says. “You can’t talk about this incident without talking about the Constitution and the Declaration.”

For four years, Losick interviewed the LaClair and Paszkiewicz families, LaClair’s fellow students, Kearny residents, attorneys and academics for his documentary, titled *In God We Teach*. “I wanted to go down the middle of the road and hear both sides,” Losick says. “I wanted to have an argument back and forth.”

This past spring, Losick invited everyone who participated in the documentary to a screening. Although five years have passed since LaClair, now a senior at the New School in Manhattan, first voiced his complaint, Losick says the gathering unleashed a spirited debate. “It was like nothing had changed,” he says. “Like we were back in the school board meeting.”

In God We Teach will be shown this month as part of the New Jersey Film Festival, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary. The screening is at 7 pm on September 10 at the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick. For more information, visit njfilmfest.com.