

# 'Columbia at 50' seeks to capture the moment

Documentary looks both backward and forward on city's milestone birthday



Columbia filmmaker Richard Krantz has produced a new documentary, "Columbia at 50: A Bridge to the Future." (Algerina Perna/The Baltimore Sun )

**By Janene Holzberg** For the Baltimore Sun

More than 100 events celebrating Columbia's 50th birthday this year have touched upon nearly every facet of life in the planned city that sprang from the mind of developer James Rouse and into the farmlands of Howard County.

Into this surfeit of offerings comes a late entry in the form of a 30-minute documentary film produced by the Howard County Citizens Association that will receive a red-carpet premiere on Sept. 13.

“Columbia at 50: A Bridge to the Future” – a film that seeks to spark a dialogue about the need to protect Columbia’s original vision and quality of life – will be shown at 7 p.m. in the Smith Theatre at Howard Community College.

A donor reception at 6 p.m. will precede the showing, which will be followed by a panel discussion led by Rouse biographer Josh Olsen and conclude with an audience discussion and question-and-answer period.

While all VIP-donor tickets and free tickets have been claimed, more public showings are in the works at village centers, county branch libraries and Vantage House, among other locations. Updates will be posted online at [howardcountyhcca.org](http://howardcountyhcca.org) and on the Howard County Citizens Association Facebook page.

Founded in 1961, the nonprofit HCCA, which currently has 105 paid-up members, commissioned the documentary from Columbia-based filmmaker Richard Krantz, president of Pilot Productions.

The message behind the film is clear-cut, organizers say: Howard County residents must get involved in shepherding Columbia’s development into the next 50 years.

“Columbia has had a very positive effect on Howard County in general and the Columbia Association has maintained it immaculately,” said Brian England, a member of the HCCA board of directors and owner of British American Auto Care, which is one of the film’s major sponsors. “But there’s no vision, and that’s frustrating. It’s not a given that Columbia stays a planned community, and there are numerous forces working against that.”

England said the documentary “points out the positives and the negatives” of Columbia at 50.

“It captures the moment,” he said. “The film has a certain amount of uncertainty, and that’s where we are right now.”

A four-minute fundraising video offers a taste of what’s contained in the documentary and can be viewed online at [vimeo.com/206159184](http://vimeo.com/206159184). It makes the case that a gatekeeper is needed to provide oversight of Columbia’s development.

“But so far, no corporation or county agency has stepped up to do what the Rouse Co. once did,” HCCA treasurer J.D. Smith states in the video.

England estimated the average age of the nonprofit’s members is 65 and said the organization is working to attract younger county residents to join.

“HCCA has been labeled as not wanting change, but that label was unfairly put on us and it has held us back,” he said. “We are all about passing the baton to the next generation so Columbia remains an innovative community.”

The educational and informational film is a sequel of sorts. In 1987, Krantz made a 20th birthday film about the Rouse Co. called “Our Town Columbia” for the now-defunct Columbia Forum civic organization.

“HCCA gave me the freedom to be creative and the license to do it as I saw fit after we discussed what we thought this new documentary would be like,” said Krantz, 77, who has lived in Columbia since 1983.

An investigative reporter at WTTG Channel 5 in Washington before opening his video production business in 1986, Krantz said he has literally lost sleep over the project, which he said has “totally consumed” his life.

“The subject of Columbia at 50 is so huge and so overwhelming. How do you tell its story?” he said.

“A lot of it is a gut thing,” he said of his filmmaking approach. “I tried to use all of my reporter training and background. It certainly isn’t a fluff piece; it goes much deeper.”

The film opens with scenes of life in Columbia as various interviewees extol the virtues of living in a unique and ethnically diverse city that has “a humanitarian identity” and was designed to embrace “an abundance of nature.”

Krantz points out in the film that with Money magazine naming Columbia the best place in the country to live in its September 2016 issue, the city approached its 50th birthday this year “riding a wave of good feeling ... as changes to give downtown a more urban feel are just starting to be visible.”

Krantz wrote and performed the film’s narration, and served as videographer along with a crew of three independent professionals. The video includes 28 of the 40 interviews he conducted, he said.

“Will Columbia build on its success or be a victim of it?” he asks in his narration. “Will it stay true to Rouse’s goals?”

Among those making an appearance in the film, in order, are: state Sen. Guy Guzzone; Beverly White Seals, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Howard County; Liz Bobo, former state delegate and county executive; Milton Matthews, CA president and CEO; County Executive Allan Kittleman; Valdis Lazdins, county planning and zoning director; Cy Paumier, former Rouse Co. landscape architect; Mary Kay Sigaty and Jen Terrasa, county council members; Cynthia Vaillancourt, board of education chairwoman; and Bridget Mugane, former HCCA president.

Not everyone Krantz asked to comment on screen agreed to do so.

“Certain people would not agree to be interviewed even though I asked them repeatedly and told them they’d be better off representing their point of view,” he said, declining to name them.

HCCA is still raising funds to cover the costs of making and marketing the film, said England, who contributed \$5,000 through his business. The first \$20,000 raised was earmarked for the filmmaker, he said.

CA also contributed \$5,000 to the project, according to David Greisman, CA spokesman.

“Columbia Association grants often support projects or organizations working for the greater community good,” Greisman said. “CA supported this documentary to help further the story of Columbia and as part of Columbia's 50th birthday.”

England said some of the money will be used to “take the show on the road.”

In addition to more public screenings, HCCA is discussing the possibility of showcasing the film in the county's public schools, and it will be featured at a 2018 salon being planned by the Little Patuxent Review, a Columbia-based literature and arts journal.

“We want everyone to understand why Columbia is so special and why it's important to keep it as a planned community,” he said.

“We've lived and breathed it, so we understand what it means. It's a big deal, and that's what's driving us. We're just trying to create a bridge into the future.”