

Romerikes Blad

Christian Schoyen (48) from Kløfta

Changed Las Vegas

Christian Schoyen from Norway turned around the most dangerous community in the American city; Las Vegas. To document it, he filmed everything.

JOURNALIST OYVIND MO LARSEN
olya@arb.no

Las Vegas is to most people known as the city where you can gamble and a place with the most spectacular lit up main street.

- But, Las Vegas also has a dark side, says Christian Schoyen to Romerikes Blad.

Low-income America

- It is two million people that live outside the lit-up Las Vegas Boulevard. There are a great many of these people that still struggles after the financial collapse in 2007, says Schoyen, who just completed the documentary film: "Vegas Vikings".

His film shows how volunteer organizations and individuals stood together in a project where the goal was to improve the childrens conditions in the most dangerous and poverty stricken part of Las Vegas; Sierra Oeste.

- Tell me about the film?

- The film document the process itself and the blue-print, describing how the volunteers take on the challenge of turning around the community to help the children living there.

- The success of the project is all due to the strong commitment of these unique individuals. They put aside time from their already busy schedule, to join together in this collaborative initiative in the part of the town with the highest concentration of gang members in all of Las Vegas. With achieving a 75% reduction in violent crime this project has been a great success, says Schoyen.

Working together is key

Behind the initiative and project director Schoyen says that his role has primarily been to recruit group members and make everyone work well together,

this being the 15 non-profit organizations, the volunteers, the local church, the police and local government. What was done here has never been done before says Schoyen.

- Where did you get the film title from?

- The first people and organization I approached in Las Vegas was the Vegas Vikings Lodge of Sons of Norway. Metaphorically the courage of the a Viking was necessary to enter the Sierra Oeste community.

- A key idea was that the Vikings took care of and watched out for their tribe, leaving nobody behind. It was this kind of mentality that each member joining the group needed. When reflecting on the enormous support gained for this collective community initiative, it is overwhelming. An entire city came together to give a helping hand to those who had fallen on the outside.

Wants to inspire others

- Why did you involve yourself in the first place in the problems of this community in Las Vegas?

- My belief is that if we all make a contribution to help those who are not so fortunate then many of the ones struggling can also succeed. It's a question about taking a responsibility for our community. With the success that has now been achieved in Sierra Oeste it is now fully possible to not only achieve the same in the other struggling parts of Las Vegas, but also in other cities.

- But, you worked for free for years?

- I was in the field for 21 days spread over two years.

In USA there is an expression called "Pay it forward", which means you do something positive for others without expecting anything back, except that your deed can inspire others to do the same other places.

- What is the onward journey?

- The documentary had a theatrical screening for companies and non-profit organizations in

Oslo, Norway on October 29th. Next is to take the film to the US, where there will be several screenings at film festivals.

- For the revenues of the project?

- The entire project has from my side been pro-bono, so any financials has gone straight into the project to help improve the living conditions for the children in Las Vegas.

- What has this project meant for you personally?

- This community project went far beyond what I originally had hoped for. The media coverage throughout the project was extensive, both in print publications and for television. I believe that one of the reasons for this is the uniqueness of an entire city coming together as such happened here to make a difference.

- The success achieved in this struggling part of the city means a lot for the State of Nevada and Las Vegas. But, also for the rest of the country does this project have a strong significance, due the proof that now exists of this proven work model, which can be implemented in also other US cities, says Schoyen.

FACTS

■ Christian Schoyen is behind, plus project director for a unique initiative with the goal of improving children living conditions in the most dangerous, low-income part of Las Vegas.

■ The entire project is documented in the documentary: Vegas Vikings – the 21 day challenge.

■ The film just won the award: Best Nevada Documentary of the year at the Nevada Film Festival.

■ The documentary is to be screened at a number of US film festivals throughout the year.

■ Schoyen screened the film for Norwegian companies and non-profit organizations. Schoyen's profession in the corporate world is to retain talent and build winning teams, as a headhunter.

■ The care for others wellbeing and helping those in need has followed Schoyen throughout his life ever since his university studies in African American studies at age 22.

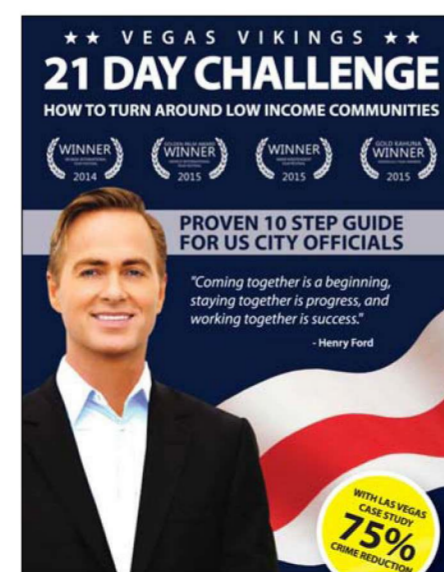


UNITED: Christian Schoyen (middle) succeeded to unite the non-profit organizations and local police in the American city Las Vegas to undertake the collective initiative in the most dangerous community of the city. The goal was to improve the children's living conditions. The documentary is now complete and the goal is that also other cities in the US will implement the successful blueprint.

ALL PHOTOS: FROM FILM "VEGAS VIKINGS".



LOBBYING: Christian Schoyen used extensive time to promote the project to the entire City, including the city officials.



THE FILM: This is the film cover of "Vegas Vikings".



PROUD: The police in Las Vegas was an essential part of the project. It was critical that they were part of it, says Christian Schoyen.