

[ FILM ] BY JACQUELINE MROZ

## Documenting a Newark Success Story

**LONG-TIME NEWARK RESIDENTS** Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno knew of the challenges that the city's disadvantaged children face in trying to finish school. Then they learned about St. Benedict's Prep, a unique all-boys private school in the city with an astounding college acceptance rate near 100 percent. That's unheard of in Newark, which has a dismal 26 percent poverty rate, and a graduation rate of only 22 percent.

The Bongornos, both filmmakers and former teachers, were compelled to make a film about the remarkable school. "We were blown away by what's being done at this very special place," says Marylou.

Their film, *The Rule*, presents St. Benedict's as a model for other cities with similar challenges. Run by Benedictine monks of Newark Abbey, the 145-year-old school has an enrollment of 560 students, mainly African-American and Latino. It is helmed by Father Edwin Leahy, a legendary figure

in Newark academic circles.

*The Rule* documents St. Benedict's unusual strategies, including its student leadership system and extensive counseling program for students. The school, which is in session 11 months out of the year, also has an on-site residence, which allows students with problems at home to stay overnight to receive counseling and tutoring.

"Here are the solutions to problems with schooling in the inner city," says Jerome. "We no longer have an excuse for low-performing schools." The Bongornos are working with Teachers College at Columbia University in New York on a film study guide for use by policy makers and educators.

Upcoming showings of *The Rule* in-

clude 7 PM on November 7 at Nutley Public Library and 8 PM on November 12 at Seton Hall University in South Orange. The documentary is the second in a planned film trilogy by the Bongornos. The first film, released in 2007, is the critically acclaimed, award-winning documentary *Revolution '67* showing on the Starz network, about the 1967 Newark riots; the third, *Rust*, will cover solutions to poverty in Newark and other rust-belt cities. ■

