

Contact: James LaVeck, (607) 275-0806, james@tribeofheart.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Public Broadcast of Award-winning Film *The Witness*

***The Witness* Highlights the Dramatic and Inspiring Personal Transformation of Tough Brooklyn Construction Contractor Whose Heart is Opened by the Love of a Kitten**

**Richmond Resident Concerned About Local Animal Abuse Case
Convinces Station to Air Film**

Tuesday, December 28th, 11:00pm
WCVE Richmond PBS, WHTJ Charlottesville PBS

Richmond, VA, December 17, 2004 —Due to the efforts of a VCU pre-vet student concerned about a local animal abuse case, an award-winning film about Eddie Lama, a tough Brooklyn construction contractor whose life was transformed by the love of a kitten, will be aired on central Virginia PBS. *The Witness* makes its Virginia broadcast debut on December 28th at 11:00pm on the Community Idea Stations WCVE Richmond PBS and WHTJ Charlottesville PBS. The 43-minute documentary, which chronicles Lama's unlikely journey from loathing animals to devoting his life to their protection, won six film festival Best Documentary awards and has been broadcast on independent film showcases of numerous PBS stations across America.

In September, a kitten set was set on fire by two teenage boys in Whitcomb Court. Student April Kung was working in the clinic that received the cat for treatment. Said Kung, "As the veterinarians poked her with needles to deliver fluids and rubbed medicinal creams over her wounds, she never attempted to scratch or bite, and instead purred whenever she was handled. Because of her grace under these circumstances, she was named 'Gracie.'" Sadly, the kitten did not survive.

"Like many people who had heard about Gracie, my first reaction was anger," admitted Kung, "but I realized that I had to come up with a more positive response." So she approached WCVE's VP of Programming and Production, John Felton, about airing *The Witness*.

Kung was thrilled that he agreed to air the film, saying, "If those boys had been exposed to this film, they never would have set Gracie on fire. I think Eddie Lama is the kind of role model that kids today need. Someone to show them that true strength comes from compassion, not cruelty. So I hope that having *The Witness* broadcast on public television will get that message out to as many people as possible."

Pulitzer Prize-winning *Los Angeles Times* columnist Howard Rosenberg said: "*The Witness* is one man's truth that cries out for mass exposure... may be the most important film about animals ever made."

"I cannot remember being so moved by television for years," wrote a viewer after the film's PBS broadcast in Denver. "Bravo! for offering constructive, positive alternatives and actions that people can take out into the world," wrote another PBS viewer in San Jose, California.

For his groundbreaking street level education work, Eddie Lama was honored with the Peace Abbey's *Courage of Conscience Award*. Past honorees have included Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama. "In my lifetime," said Lama as he accepted the award, "I have been both the oppressor and the oppressed, both the fomenter of discord and the advocate for peace, both the perpetrator and the victim. But most significantly, I have been both the silence and the voice. It is the human voice that is the primary tool for change."

"*The Witness* touches something very deep in audience members," says producer James LaVeck, "because it shows how any person, from any background, can change. Eddie Lama is living proof of something that we all hope and pray is true, that one person's change of heart can change the world." LaVeck and the film's director, Jenny Stein, founded their non-profit production company, Tribe of Heart, to fill an unmet need for films that explore the human potential to respond to injustice with creativity and non-violence. Tribe of Heart's second film, *Peaceable Kingdom*, is currently on the film festival circuit and recently won a festival award for "enriching the human spirit through film."

An advance copy of The Witness is available to members of the media upon request. Phone interviews with the filmmakers and/or any of the film's subjects can be arranged by contacting Tribe of Heart directly at (607) 275-0806 or mail@tribeofheart.org.