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## 'This Life Ain't Pretty' premiere scheduled Tuesday

By **AMANDA REAVY**  
**THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER**  
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A locally directed short film aimed at challenging stereotypes surrounding HIV and AIDS is premiering Tuesday at the University of Illinois Springfield. Independent filmmaker Kimberly Conner said the premiere date is significant because it is World AIDS Day.

"It's been a long process, but it's been so meaningful and worthwhile," Conner, a Springfield transplant, said of her first directorial endeavor.

"I hope people will walk away with a different idea and opinion about HIV and AIDS and how we look at the people that have it and how we get it."

The film, "This Life Ain't Pretty," is the story of a single mother, Brittney Nicole Lawrence, who contracts HIV from her estranged husband and dies by age 28. The screening is free and open to the public.

Conner was inspired to write the screenplay after one of her relatives succumbed to the disease at the same age as the main character.

"I hope the fact that it's based on a true story will resonate with people as well. This was a typical, average, everyday person, and that's the point I'm driving home. It's no certain race, it's no certain look. We are all susceptible to the disease."

All of the filming took place in Springfield. Several local actors are featured, including Danielle Ward, who plays Brittney, and James Jones, who plays her 6-year-old son.

About 25 actors and 100 extras were used in the film, which runs about 35 minutes. The film's budget was \$10,000.

Investors included Conner's production company, Predestined Arts & Entertainment, as well as the Springfield Urban League. The University of Illinois at Springfield's Diversity Center offered to sponsor the premiere, which is being held at Brookens Auditorium and starts with a reception at 6 p.m.

"A lot of people are getting on board simply because of the subject matter. People are concerned about the disease and saw it as a way to get involved," Conner said.

Conner, a Champaign native who works for the Department of Healthcare and Family Services, started writing screenplays in 1997. Her pieces have placed as finalists in competitions including the University of Southern California Screenwriting Program, the Hollywood Black Film Festival and the Creative Screenwriting Magazine AAA Competition.

She wrote "This Life Ain't Pretty" three years ago, and it became a finalist in the Urban Media Makers Film Festival in Atlanta.

Work on the film began in January, with casting calls held last spring. Filming took place over three weekends last summer.

Conner says she plans to submit the film to "Lens on Talent: A Johnson & Johnson Filmmaker's Challenge," which airs winning entries on the BET television network, as well as the Sundance Film Festival.

She also is contacting social service agencies, high schools and universities to see if they're interested in showing the film.

"This is something I think the community can benefit from," Conner said. "I just want people to change their views about (HIV/AIDS), because we have to talk about it. Not talking about it is not going to make the problem go away."

Amanda Reavy can be reached at 788-1525.

### Want to go?

What: "This Life Ain't Pretty" film premiere

Where: Brookens Auditorium at the University of Illinois Springfield

When: Tuesday, reception at 6 p.m. followed by the premiere at 7 p.m.

The screening is free and open to the public. For more information about the film, visit [www.thislifeaintprettythemovie.com](http://www.thislifeaintprettythemovie.com).

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