

ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Robert Hardis, Superintendent · (216) 464-2600 ext. 2201 · rph@beachwoodschoools.org
Michele Mills, Director of Finance/Treasurer · (216) 464-2600 ext. 2211 · mm@beachwoodschoools.org
Dr. Ken Veon, Assistant Superintendent · (216) 464-2600 ext. 2202 · kev@beachwoodschoools.org
Jennifer Polak, Director of Pupil Services · (216) 464-2600 ext. 2215 · jpolak@beachwoodschoools.org
Kevin Houchins, Director of Equity & Community Engagement · (216) 464-2600 ext. 2207 · kth@beachwoodschoools.org
Linda LoGalbo, Director of Curriculum & Instruction · (216) 464-2600 ext. 2208 · lhl@beachwoodschoools.org
Lauren Broderick, Interim Administrator-Pupil Services · (216) 464-2600 ext. 2218 · ljb@beachwoodschoools.org



beachwoodschoools.org

Alumni Spotlight: Ben Ducoff and Amnon Carmi

Class of 2011 alumni Ben Ducoff and Amnon Carmi have been best friends and creative partners for more than 20 years. They met as fourth graders at recess, where Ben says they instantly clicked over a shared sense of humor and love of storytelling. Growing up, they made dozens of short films in and around Beachwood. Today, the New York-based filmmakers are still at it—collaborating professionally to produce their first feature film, *Yaniv*, and mentoring teens through their youth employment program, HERO Films.

Both credit their education at Beachwood Schools for nurturing their passion for storytelling, and they continue to find support and mentorship in their former teachers. Professionally, Ben juggles his time as an actor, producer, and U.S. history teacher at H.E.R.O. High School in the Bronx. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts from Boston University and a master's degree in secondary special education from the City College of New York. Amnon currently runs his own film production company, Roof Dragon Entertainment. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Media Studies from the New School. Previously, he owned a freelance graphic design company while living in Tel Aviv and worked in the marketing division of the financial technology company Alviere, where he produced, directed, and edited video advertisements. As a director, Amnon says he loves how quickly the needs of a production evolve. "I get to wear many hats and creatively navigate high stress and, at times, ethically challenging dilemmas on and off film sets," said Amnon. "It's a good fit for me because I work best under pressure."

Making *Yaniv*

Yaniv, which Ben and Amnon wrote together, is loosely based on Ben's experiences teaching in the South Bronx. The two spent more than a year raising funds, casting the talent, assembling a crew, and finding locations before they were ready to begin filming in 2022. Ben stars as Bernstein, a high school teacher trying to save the school musical after funding cuts. Actress Catherine Curtin (*Stranger Things*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Homeland*) plays Principal O'Donnell and is one of the film's executive producers. Other cast members include Eli Boskey, Annabel Steven, Mitchell Fields, Adam B. Shapiro (*The Normal Heart*, *Master of None*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*), Amnon Carmi, Ben Salus (*The Food That Built America*), and Nik Sadhnani (*Standing*

Up, *Falling Down*, *Bull*, *The Week Of*). The film is currently in post-production. "Filming took place in Detroit and New York, but there was a lot of Beachwood and Cleveland in this movie, in front of and behind the camera," said Ben. "Mitchell Fields, the legendary English and drama teacher who retired from Beachwood High School in the early 1990's, plays my grandfather, a part we wrote especially for him."

Inspiring Mentors

Amnon and Ben met Mr. Fields as students at the Chagrin Falls Performing Arts Academy, which is part of the Excel TECC consortium. "We developed a close bond and stayed in touch after graduating," said Ben. "He mentored me as I began teaching and inspired Amnon as he began directing. I have always admired how he balanced a fulfilling career as an educator while enjoying success as an actor and director. It was really special to have him in the film, and he was easily the most popular guy on set."

They also tapped Ben's former Bryden Elementary teacher, Steve Jurkovic, for his feedback on the script. Mr. Jurkovic has been a longtime mentor to Ben. "He saw potential in me at such a young age, encouraged me to write stories on my own, and happily read whatever I gave him," said Ben. "He is one of the few people to have seen a rough cut of *Yaniv*."

As Ben and Amnon continue to lean on their mentors in Beachwood, they hope to pay it forward by guiding a future generation of filmmakers. In 2022, they launched HERO Films in partnership with the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. The paid internship program trains aspiring filmmakers in screenwriting, cinematography, editing, and producing. As mentors, Ben and Amnon encourage teens to take creative risks and view setbacks as a springboard for growth. "There is nothing more valuable than lessons learned from simple trial and error," said Ben. "As Samuel Becket said, 'Fail better.'"

Amnon's advice to students? "If you feel daunted by the prospect of choosing a college or career path after high school, just pick what interests you the most (or deters you the least)," he said. "Life has an interesting way of altering your course and pointing you in the right direction."



Filmmakers Amnon Carmi and Ben Ducoff



Actress Annabel Steven with Ben Ducoff during the 2022 filming of *Yaniv*

Alumni: Share Your Story!

Go to www.beachwoodschoools.org/alumni.aspx.