'Humans of The Bronx' Aims to Tell Stories of Local Seniors

By Eddie Small | March 16, 2016 9:19am

THE BRONX — A Bronx-centric version of the wildly successful blog Humans of New York is coming to the borough.

Artist Ruben Dario Cruz and his production company Jurukan are teaming up with the nonprofit organization BronxWorks to launch Humans of The Bronx, a project that hopes to tell the stories of residents at BronxWorks' senior centers.

"With this project, what we’re doing is we are highlighting as many members of the senior
community at BronxWorks as possible and giving their takes on life," Cruz said.

Cruz previously worked with BronxWorks' Morris Innovative Senior Center on a short film called "Bronxerella: A Fairy Tale" and said he hoped to mainly just serve as a coordinator for Humans of The Bronx, putting the seniors themselves in charge of most of the interviews, writing and photography.

"As opposed to actually putting everything together myself, I’m going to have them try to do as much as they can," he said.

BronxWorks recently received a $5,000 grant for the project from the Bronx Council on the Arts, which was the last piece the organization needed to put the project together, according to Solomon Smart, program director of the group's East Concourse Neighborhood Senior Center.

Organizers aim to have the project culminate with a film made up of 2- to 3-minute segments per senior and a book featuring all of the photographs and narratives, which Smart compared to a yearbook.

"Maybe we’d even have a signing party where people would sign each other’s books," he said.

The subject matter of the stories will be up to the seniors, and Smart said he was excited to figure out what they have to say about their lives.

"I have seniors who remember living in the segregated south, who lived through the march on Washington," he said. "I’ve got seniors from other countries."

Cruz said they are seeing if they can get more money for the project to broaden it, but they already have enough to get started.

"Other funds are being looked into to expand this as much as possible, but right now, we’re set to go," he said. "We can make this happen with what we have."