

# LOCAL



Peter Chen/The Post-Standard

**SHARON JACK-WILLIAMS**, of Manlius, was one of more than 250 people who attended the premiere of the new documentary "Syracuse's 15th Ward and Beyond" at Syracuse Stage's Storch Theatre. **B-1**





Peter Chen / The Post-Standard

**CAROL PERRY** (center), of Syracuse, is featured in the new documentary "Syracuse's 15th Ward and Beyond." Perry greets fans during the film's premiere Saturday at Syracuse Stage's Arthur Storch Theatre.

# Melting Pot to Red Carpet

Documentary  
helps  
protect  
15th Ward  
memories

**By Bob Niedt**  
Staff writer

Richard Breland walked a red carpet Saturday, back 48 years to a time and a neighborhood that he says should never lose its place in Syracuse's collective history.

"In the 15th Ward, everybody knew everybody," said Breland of the long-gone Syracuse neighborhood that was once in danger of being forgotten. "It was a real village. We raised everyone's children, and we all got along."

"It was called the 15th Ward. It was called the ghetto. It ... was a melting pot of all people. We got along very, very well."

Breland is one of the stars of a new 90-minute documentary, "Syracuse's 15th Ward and Beyond." It debuted at a Saturday afternoon gala at the Syracuse Stage's Arthur Storch Theatre near the Syracuse University campus.

The red carpet was rolled out for Breland and many of the film's stars who lived in or grew up in the political ward that cut a swath from Erie Boulevard south to Brighton Avenue.

The documentary is a celebration of the downtown neighborhood, once home to the

city's black and Jewish populations. It was eventually wiped out by construction of Interstate 81 through downtown and the urban renewal trend of 50 years ago.

The documentary showcases the 15th Ward by blending historic Super 8 film footage, still photos and images, as well as live interviews with the people who lived in the district — some whose families came to Syracuse just after the Civil War.

Although two of them died earlier this year, many of the people interviewed were among the 250-plus audience members at the showing Saturday.

"That's why this needed to be done," said filmmaker Courtney Rile, the 2004 SU graduate who started work on the documentary in October. "This story is about the community and what used to be there." Such as: Linton Betsey's L.B. Grocery. Betsey is in the film and attended the premiere. Through her daughter, she said that capturing the bygone era is "very, very nice."

Saturday's event reunited friends and for-

**RESIDENTS, PAGE B-2**

## Next showing

**What:** The "Syracuse's 15th Ward and Beyond" documentary. Tickets to the free showing are limited.

**When:** 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday.

**Where:** ArtRage Gallery, 505 Hawley St., Syracuse.

**For information:** Call 218-5711.



# Residents reminisce

**RESIDENTS, FROM PAGE B-1**

mer neighbors who'd gone their own ways as the district dissolved. They hugged and held onto each other, saying how glad they were that it didn't take a funeral to get them together — since, these days, that's when they usually gather.

As the pictures appeared on the screen, they murmured and laughed at the images of the past.

The film's genesis can be traced to the 2006 formation of the Syracuse University South Side Initiative, a bonding of SU and the South Side neighborhood, said Linda Littlejohn, a member of the initiative's board.

She said people in the community were concerned that young people were unaware of the city's rich history, especially how self-sufficient black residents were in many respects.

In 2008, SU representatives went to the residents, holding initial meetings in the neighborhood. Out of those talks grew workshops and seminars on ways to preserve the visual and oral history of the community, Littlejohn said.

A goal is to create a virtual museum, starting with documentary, said Shirley Rowser, a multicultural specialist for the city of Syracuse, which is part of the Black History Preservation Project, along with the Initiative Office, the Onondaga Historical Association, the county library and others.

"Our goal is to have the virtual museum up by 2013," Rowser said.