

# WHO GOT THE PART?

BY NICOLE PORTER

## Ahn Nguyen... Got the Part!

Most actors in Hollywood are looking for their "big break." Actor Ahn Nguyen (pronounced "on win") found his in Paramount Picture's *Freedom Writers*, directed by Richard LaGravenese. Nguyen plays Ki, a gang leader who tries to get kids away from the high school and who later is a victim of gang violence. The film is based on the book and true story of a young teacher (played by Hilary Swank), in Long Beach's Wilson High School, who inspires her class of at-risk students to learn tolerance and pursue higher education.

On June 5, Nguyen answered the nonunion background casting call for *Gridiron Gang*

**SAG Actor**

placed by On Location Casting. Extras casting director Tina Kerr kept the actor's info on file and later invited his friend to attend an extras open call for *Freedom Writers*. Nguyen wasn't really interested in participating in the film but went along anyway to help out a friend. "My friend didn't have a car, and I took him. Instead of waiting outside, I went up and put my name on the list to see if I could get in, too," he recalls.

Kerr admits the casting process for featured background actors was involved and required several callbacks. After an exhaustive audition process, Nguyen was presented to the film's director and the principal casting director Margery Simkin. Despite never having acted before, Nguyen impressed Kerr, LaGravenese, and Simkin. They agreed to bump him up to principal and "not waste him on one of these featured



extra roles.' There was just something real about his presence that made our director think that he would feel the role more than try to act it," Kerr explains.

"I was so shocked," Nguyen says. "I thank God

for giving it to me because I know [the part] could have gone to anyone else." For the past few weeks the actor has been working closely with the director and stunt coordinator. He's even taken a few pointers from his Oscar-winning co-star. "[Swank is] really, really down-to-earth," he says. "She's one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. I take a little bit from what I see out there and put it into the character. It's all thanks to Tina. She's the best."

*Freedom Writers* is shooting on location and is scheduled for release later this year.

**Has Back Stage West helped you get cast in the past year? We'd love to tell your story. Be in the new weekly column by calling (323) 525-2358 or emailing [bswcasting@backstage.com](mailto:bswcasting@backstage.com) with "I Got the Part" in the subject line.**