

FRIENDS OF 'GANGSTER' COP SAY FILM GIVES AN HONEST PORTRAYAL

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Marty Shumsky and Richie Roberts shared some dramatic moments on the football field, but none like those depicted in "American Gangster."

The fact-based film, which opened Friday, focuses on Roberts, who, as a police detective and prosecutor, toppled Harlem drug kingpin **Frank Lucas**. Shumsky, now owner of Reno Game Sales, played high school football with Roberts in Newark, N.J. And he and his wife, Paula, have maintained a close relationship with the former detective ever since.

Their bond is so tight that Marty was best man at Roberts' first wedding, and Roberts is godfather to the Shumskys' oldest son. The Shumskys even netted an invite to the "American Gangster" premiere Oct. 19 at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, where they walked the red carpet with the film's stars.

"It was very exciting," Paula Shumsky says.

It was also interesting for the Shumskys to watch superstar Russell Crowe portray their dear friend.

"Richie was a consultant on the movie," Marty says. "I think he was pretty happy" with the film, "and rightfully so because I think they portrayed him as somebody to emulate and they portrayed him as an honest cop."

"American Gangster," directed by Academy Award-nominee Ridley Scott ("Gladiator," "Black Hawk Down," "Thelma and Louise"), takes pains to depict Roberts as a straight-arrow in a New York-New Jersey police community riddled with corruption. In one sequence, Roberts turns in nearly \$1 million in confiscated cash, despite pressure from his partner to keep it. The Shumskys say the incident actually occurred.

There are, however, elements of Roberts' story that were fictionalized for dramatic effect. One of the most obvious, the Shumskys say, is a subplot that shows the detective dating numerous women while fighting for custody of his young son.

"Richie and his first wife never had children, so there was no custody battle," Paula says. "And, to the best of our knowledge, I don't think Richie was ever a womanizer."

The Shumskys also say Crowe's portrayal of Roberts contains traces of the real man. Crowe spent a good deal of time with their friend while preparing for the role.

"They got along very well," Marty says. "I know (Richie) talks to Russell on the telephone."

Even though the film takes liberties with its portrayal of their friend, the Shumskys say it's an outstanding work.

"I think it is up there with 'The Godfather,' up there with the best of them," Marty says.

ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: Russell Crowe is outcast cop Richie Roberts in "American Gangster."

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