A quirky genius' attempt to solve the world's water problem: *SlingShot* on Aug. 8

*Photos: (Top) Boys at Pakro Methodist School in Ghana try out the SlingShot; (bottom) Dean Kamen in his Manchester, NH, headquarters, with a dialysis machine.*

HANOVER, NH, July 10, 2014—What does it take to create something that can truly improve life for lots of people?

That's the question addressed in *SlingShot*, an acclaimed new documentary film to receive a special advance screening on Friday, August 8, at 7 pm, in the Hop's Spaulding Auditorium. The film's director, Paul Lazarus, a 1976 Dartmouth graduate who's a veteran theater, TV and film director, will present the film and be on hand for a post-screening Q & A.

The film focuses on the SlingShot, a water purifier that Bedford, NH, inventor Dean Kamen developed for use in the world's poorest countries with the dirtiest water. More than that, the film enters Kamen's world and watches as the man many consider "a 21st-century Edison" doggedly persists in pushing the SlingShot toward worldwide implementation. This year the film has won important awards at six prominent film festivals, most recently netting "Best of Fest" at the AFI Docs festival on July 1, in Washington, DC.

The machine's name is derived from the biblical battle between David and Goliath, in which the shepherd boy defeats the giant with a slingshot. "The Goliath of the 21st century for millions of people is bad water," Kamen told *The New Hampshire Union-Leader* in 2012, "and all those little villages need a slingshot to deal with that Goliath. The 21st-century slingshot is right here."

The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted lack of clean water as one of the persistent causes of discomfort and illness in less-developed areas of the planet. Only about 2 percent of water on this planet is drinkable; most of us forget that we depend on systems of purification, aqueducts, or wells to bring fresh water to our kitchen faucets. But for much of the earth’s population, getting fresh water is a daily struggle. Some 300,000 die annually from illness or malnutrition or other factors due to lack of clean water, WHO estimates.
A quirky genius with a sharp wit and a provocative worldview, Kamen is best known for his Segway Human Transporter, but also has reconceived kidney dialysis, engineered an electric wheelchair that can travel up stairs (the Ibot), reworked the heart stent, built portable insulin pumps, founded FIRST robotics to inspire young students, and on and on. Holder of over 440 patents, Kamen devotes himself to dreaming up products that improve people’s lives. For the past 15 years, he has relentlessly pursued an effective way to clean up the world’s water supply. Kamen was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1997, received the Heinz Award in 1998, and was awarded the National Medal of Technology in 2000. He was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in May 2005.

Lazarus, who has known Kamen for 20 years, has collaborated on prior films about Kamen’s initiatives, including FIRST Robotics. In 2006, Lazarus proposed doing a film that follows a Kamen invention from infancy to implementation. Kamen suggested the SlingShot, then in its early stages of development.

Just like other types of water purifiers, the SlingShot works by boiling and evaporating water from any source—rivers, oceans, even raw sewage—then allowing the pure water to condense and be collected. What sets the SlingShot apart is that it is able to do so with a fraction of the electricity or fuel other units require, producing about 10 gallons of clean water an hour while consuming less than 1 kilowatt of electricity, about half the power needed for a handheld blow dryer. This attribute—along with its compact size (equal to a hotel mini-bar fridge) and low number of moving parts—makes it a good match for remote villages with fitful electricity service and low access to technology.

Over the next seven years, between such projects as directing films, theater and episodes of TV’s Pretty Little Liars, The Middle and Ugly Betty, Lazarus aimed his camera on Kamen as he refined the invention, field-tested it in Ghana in 2011, and wooed and won the major backing that the project required—a saga of ups, downs, advances and reversals. A major advance—one that promises to at last deliver the machine to those who need it most—occurred in 2012, when Coca-Cola agreed to a multimillion deal that would allow Kamen’s DEKA Research and Development Corp. place SlingShots in communities throughout Latin America and Africa.

Lazarus has a 30-year award-winning career as a director, producer and writer of television, film, and theater projects. He directed and produced the feature film Seven Girlfriends, featured on HBO and Comedy Central; and, for Dreamworks SKG, voice-directed the animated musical feature, Joseph, starring Ben Affleck. Based in Los Angeles, he has directed many notable prime time television series, most recently Pretty Little Liars for ABC Family, Second Generation Wayans for the BET, The Middle, Samantha Who? and Ugly Betty for ABC, and Big Time Rush for Nickelodeon.

For the Hollywood Bowl, he produced and directed the acclaimed 75th birthday tribute to Stephen Sondheim, which featured the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Barbra Streisand, Warren Beatty, Angela Lansbury, Carol Burnett, Bernadette Peters, among many others. Other recent credits include directing Kristin Chenoweth in her solo concert debut and the world premiere of a new musical, The People vs. Mona, at the Pasadena Playhouse, for which he served in the past as Artistic Director. He has directed over ninety plays and musicals in such prominent theaters as The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Playwrights Horizons, The Manhattan Theater Club, Circle Rep, The Actors Studio, La Mama ETC, and The Goodspeed Opera House, to name a few.

Theater, in fact, is what brought Kamen and Lazarus together, initially. In the early 1990s, Lazarus was directing a play in Milford, NH. His father, who had befriended Kamen while the inventor was working for the elder Lazarus' company, suggested they all attend the play's opening night. Introduced afterwards to Paul Lazarus, Kamen asked if Lazarus could help Kamen with a project to build a theater in Manchester. Lazarus agreed to give it try, and that project led to others.
CALENDAR LISTING:

Special advance screening: *SlingShot*

Veteran film and TV director Paul Lazarus ’76 returns to campus with this special advance screening. His eye-opening documentary follows iconoclast inventor and modern hero Dean Kamen (of Segway fame), who just might have enough passion, will and innovative thinking to solve the planet’s biggest crisis. *SlingShot* traces the story of Kamen’s revolutionary water purification machine—which has the potential to prevent 50% of all human illness—from its inception to trials in Africa. *D: Paul Lazarus, US, 2014, 93m*

Friday, August 8, 7 pm
Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center for the Arts, Hanover NH
$10, $5 Dartmouth students
Information: hop.dartmouth.edu or 603.646.2422

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Founded in 1962, the Hopkins Center for the Arts is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50th-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.