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BELOIT INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL HONORS ITS BEST

March 06, 2017 at 4:00 pm | By [Hillary Gavan \(mailto:hgavan@beloitdailynews.com\)](mailto:hgavan@beloitdailynews.com)



Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News Beloit International Film Festival Executive Director Rod Beaudoin won the Lifetime Achievement Award at Saturday's BIFFY Awards at La Casa Grande. He is one of the co-founders of the festival. Filmmaker Damien Patrik said he treated filmmakers like royalty and made the event about the art of film making.

BELOIT — The art of filmmaking can effect change, especially when it's done in Beloit.

That's what filmmakers at the Beloit International Film Festival's (BIFF) 2017 BIFFY awards said about the 10-day celebration of screen artistry otherwise known as BIFF. The festival kicked off Friday, Feb. 24, and ran through Sunday, March 5.

Assistant Director Max Maiken said the festival's first weekend was strong although numbers were still coming in for the next weekend. He said there was a lot of energy surrounding the festival this year, more activities surrounding it and many out-of-towners who attended festivities.

Filmmakers and fans gathered for the BIFFY awards held Saturday evening at La Casa Grande. After sharing their experiences, award winners were honored during the ceremony emceed by BIFF co-founder Becky Rogers.

The evening's big winner with two awards was "American Street Kid" produced by BIFF 2017 Honorary Chair Jon Pavlovsky and Michelle Kaufer. The film is about teen homelessness in Los Angeles.

Earlier in the week, the film was the choice for the Blackhawk Bank People's Choice Award, selected by regular attendees at the BIFF Year 'Round Wednesday evening film series at the Hendricks Center at Beloit College. The film, part of the Beloit Health System's BIFF CARES series, also received BIFF's top award, the Power of Film Award.

Although Beloit is a bit quieter and colder than Hollywood, Pavlovsky said the community embraced his film in a big way. In an interview before the ceremony, Pavlovsky said many of his audiences had watched Project 16:49, about unaccompanied youth, and were prepared to talk about solutions for teen homelessness. Pavlovski said he was also impressed with how the community made the arts and film the focus of the festival.

He also said he was impressed with the volunteers including an attorney who was his volunteer driver. It seemed the entire community came together.

"They made it feel as an art form as opposed to a business," Pavlovsky said.

BIFF Executive Director Rod Beaudoin received the Lifetime Achievement Award for his service to BIFF for the past 12 years. Filmmaker Damien Patrik said Beaudoin treated filmmakers like royalty, with cars to drive them around, great parties and personal introductions to other filmmakers. Patrik said his week in Beloit keeps his morale high year round.

The executive director BIFFY, went to the Beloit Daily News for its recognition and support of BIFF from its earliest days. The Beloit Daily News prints and distributes the program as an insert to 10,000 homes in the weeks before the festival.

Other awards given out Saturday night included: Director of Programming, "Last Days of Summer"; Best Narrative Short, "A Beautiful Day"; Best Documentary Short, "Journey to Aleppo"; Ken Hendricks Award for Excellence, "Heart of Nuba"; the Josh Burton award, "Hear the Silence"; Best Documentary Feature, "Saving Banksy"; Best Narrative Feature, "Demimonde"; Best Wisconsin Feature, "Bear and the Owl"; Best Illinois Feature, "The Monster Within"; Best Wisconsin Short "Gemutlichkeit"; Best Illinois Short, "Strongroom" and Best Foreign Language Feature, "The Open Door" (La Puerta Abierta).

"Bear and Owl" producers Jan Jensen and Mark Allen Davis said it was an amazing week for them to show the story of the late Clinton schools superintendent Bob Jensen's therapeutic artwork. In 1986 Jensen sent then 7-year-old Joni Vorass Lillard cartoon-filled and sometimes life-sized cards to lift her spirits.

Jensen's daughter, Jan, said all five of the showings were sold out resulting in a sixth showing on Sunday. The film brought out those who knew Vorass Lillard's family as well as a huge Clinton crowd.

"It was a Clinton family and high school reunion," Jan Jensen said.

Jensen said many of the Clintonites were surprised with how downtown Beloit has blossomed and grown.

The festival was also life changing for Jean-Andre Fourestie of Canada and Julie Gourdain of Paris, France. The two international filmmakers said it was a rich experience to be able to share their films and find commonalities with others with a love of film.

Gourdain's short film "Veil of Silence" was about a teen girl in 1968 France who went to a home to give birth anonymously. Fourestie's film "Stone Story" was a long feature documentary about an aging hippie and his family as they come to terms with the choices made to follow one's true values.

Showing his film, which took four years to create, was a special experience to have in Beloit. Fourestie said it was an experience he will always carry with him.