

BIFF growing to span 10 days

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The Ninth Annual Beloit International Film Festival (BIFF) 2014 will feature higher quality films for a longer period of time in downtown Beloit, with a special focus on the light and comedic.

“Our films are exciting this year and light years beyond anything we’ve shown before,” said Executive Director Rod Beaudoin. “The economy and Beloit is recovering and I think people want things that are inspiring, and want to be able to laugh.”

BIFF is expanding to 10 days this year at more than a dozen venues in downtown Beloit on Feb. 14-23. Beaudoin said the selection committee has tightened up the voting process. With the new system, there will be fewer films with more showings in more locations.

Although there will be films shown in Janesville a month before the festival on Jan. 16 and 17, and first Friday of the month showings in Rockford, the focus of BIFF 2014 will be all about drawing attention to Beloit.

BIFF has also become a year-round event, which has honed its top notch selection process. Bushel & Peck’s, for example, has been showing BIFF films to audiences every Wednesday at 6 p.m. The films have also been rated from Society Learning Unlimited (SLU) and the BIFF Board. And only those films with a score of above 4.1 out of 5 stars will be included this year.

In addition to the more than 400 people who volunteer for BIFF each year, Beaudoin said this year BIFF had 12 interns from Beloit College and the University of Wisconsin Rock County. A entire team of interns was assigned to Creative Director Kristin Peterson to search the world for comedies and exciting high-quality films.

Beaudoin noted community feedback last year indicated people thought the festival was getting too dark.

“We adjusted immediately,” Beaudoin said. “We will lighten up the festival, and we have the resources to bring in additional interns and staff to accomplish this.”

Although there are still documentaries featuring issues of importance, the number of them is down to 10 or 11, with the inclusion of two comedic documentaries. There will also be fewer short slots, although they will be of higher quality.

Having the festival spread over 10 days, Beaudoin said, will give people enough time to get out and see more of the films and refer their favorites to their friends.

One of Peterson's new additions to BIFF 2014 is screenings by Wisconsin and Illinois filmmakers at the "Wisconsin Illinois Showdown" during the first three days of BIFF, Feb. 14-16. Audiences will have an opportunity to vote for films in a variety of categories at the Showdown. During the first weekend of BIFF, for example, 70 percent of films will be from Wisconsin and Illinois.

The 10-day program expansion will also allow BIFF to present its award winning Youth@BIFF and Student Filmmakers programs for students, with more time and opportunity for presentations. Much anticipated BIFF favorites such as the Blackhawk Bank Launch Party, the BMO Harris Silent Film Showcase featuring the Beloit Janesville Symphony, and the First National Bank Classic Film closing event, and BIFF Plus Music are all on the schedule once again.

Beaudoin and Peterson said they have seen about 70 percent of the 650 films, calling it "grueling fun."

Plans are underway to have a 2-day mini festival in Rockford this May to drum up more interest in BIFF in Beloit.

The annual BIFF Sneak Peek party at which time the full schedule will be distributed, and will take place Jan. 15 at The Ironworks Hotel in cooperation with the Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce. The BIFF box office will open at that time.

BIFF is sponsored by the Hendricks Group and is presented in association with Beloit College. Support for the Festival comes from area businesses and civic organizations and from Visit Beloit. Individual support for BIFF is provided through memberships in the BIFF Founders and the Film Society of Beloit. For more information, please visit the BIFF website at BeloitFilmFest.com.