

Locals excited for opening weekend of Beloit Film Festival

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By [Nick Crow](#)

BELOIT—What happens when people from all over the world come together to share a passion they love?

If you ask Beloit resident Matt Goodwin, he'll tell you it's "everything."

"It's like going to a concert where everyone loves music," Goodwin said. "Everyone here loves film, and it's fun to see them in different venues and to be able to talk to some of the filmmakers."

"This has got to be the coolest thing that's going on in Beloit," he said.

Goodwin was on hand Friday night at Bushel & Peck's to view the film "Jessica" on the opening night of the Beloit International Film Festival. The festival, in its 11th year, runs until Feb. 28.

"Jessica" tells the story of a girl who is coping with an unstable world in which everyone she knows seems to be moving on without her.

"It was a grueling film to make," said director Scott Foley. "We put in 12 hours every day."

Foley, a Marinette native who now lives in Brooklyn, said he is enjoying the atmosphere of BIFF partially because it's in his home state.

"It's a great community festival that has a lot of good community energy," Foley said.

It's that community energy that has driven Bagels & More owners David and Joan Siekierski to host films in their store every year since the festival began.

"We're a charter member," David said. "We'll see a whole lot of people coming in to fill this place up. In the past, we've had standing room only."

Joan said not only is the festival good for business, but it also opens up the community to people who might never visit Beloit otherwise.

"It gives people here a perspective on different cultures," Joan said. "You are able to see a wide variety of things. It's been a really positive film festival for Beloit."

"It makes people feel like something cool is going on, something unique," she said.

Eight venues in Beloit will showcase 99 narrative films, documentaries and shorts from 21 countries until the end of the festival. Of those, 11 films are from Wisconsin filmmakers. Another 12 are from Illinois.

Also on tap are block parties with live music, a classic film screening, a sing-along film and a silent film showcase.

The biggest film draw for BIFF's opening night Friday was a showing of "Waffle Street," organizers said. The film, which stars Danny Glover and James Lafferty, tells the story of a hedge fund manager who loses his job and winds up as a waiter at a waffle shop.

Last year, BIFF announced a new partnership with the Hollywood Film Festival. As part of the agreement, the two entities agreed to share staff and other resources, meaning BIFF was able to review about 1,500 movies for this year's festival.

Dave Burdick has volunteered at the festival since it began because it's a unique experience to have in the city, he said.

"It's great," Burdick said. "With Beloit College, we have culture, but this brings people from outside the community here."

Burdick said Beloit has many things that appeal to people, and the festival is a chance to showcase them.

"If you've never been here and done BIFF, volunteer and you'll get an experience that you will carry with you a while," Burdick said.

"People are excited to come here and get a one-on-one experience, see up-and-coming films and be exposed to what Beloit has to offer," he said.