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Beloit film festival kicks off with drive-in movies, full virtual lineup

By BRAD ALLEN Staff writer

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BELOIT — Venturing out to catch a drive-in movie is something that Beloit resident Priscilla Cobb remembers fondly growing up. And on Friday night, she was able to share that experience with her grandchildren.

On the opening day of the 16th annual Beloit International Film Festival (BIFF), Cobb attended a showing of “Isle of Dogs” with her grandsons Curtis Cobb, 13, DaSha Davis, 9, and her granddaughter Paradise Davis, 5.

The family-friendly movie was displayed on a giant inflatable screen, with viewers able to tune into the audio from their cars over the radio.

Cobb said it was her first time attending a BIFF event and loved the chance for a convenient family outing.

“It’s a new experience for the kids,” Cobb said, as her grandchildren cozied up in the back seat. “We got plenty of snacks and blankets back there.”

BIFF Executive Director Greg Gerard said the organizers were happy to be able to host a hybrid festival this year as the pandemic has forced the film festival to move several movies from public, in-person showings to online showings.

“We felt it was important to keep it alive and make it happen regardless. I think we’re in pretty good shape,” Gerard said. “We’re hoping this will give families a break. It will be some free entertainment and hopefully something they’ve never done before.”

BIFF will show six drive-in style movies and they all will be shown near the Ironworks campus in downtown Beloit at no cost.

Other drive-in style movies shown over the weekend included *The Wizard of Oz* on Saturday. The next drive-in movies will be the silent film *Modern Times* on Feb. 26, *Sixteen Candles* on Feb. 27 and *Kubo and the Two Strings* on Feb. 28.

A drive-in showing of *Benny Joon* originally planned for Sunday was postponed due to weather conditions. The movie will instead be shown at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday.

BIFF has partnered with the Auckland, New Zealand-based streaming service Shift 72 this year. Gerard said Shift 72 has also worked with other events such as the Sundance Film Festival.

He added that as participation has held steady this year despite shifting mostly online, it’s possible BIFF will continue offering a virtual aspect to the festival in years to come, even after the pandemic.

“We found a very reputable platform that we could be confident in,” Gerard said. “It’s sort of the wild frontier with events right now. It’s really an opportunity to take a look at what you do normally and work with this new medium. It is fostering fresh ideas and new ways to do things.”

Gerard said this year, BIFF has sold more full festival passes than anticipated.



“We are only a couple of days into the festival at this point, so confidence is high that we will make a profit when all is said and done, despite the pandemic,” Gerard said.

Several local businesses offered food and drink specials downtown. Gerard said his hope was for the festival to still bring a boost in pickup orders and traffic through Beloit to help businesses out.

Gerard said Hendricks Commercial Properties provided numerous heavy duty hardware needs for the festival.

BIFF is also asking community members to consider donating to the organization, as it looks to raise \$10,000 for its “Build Up BIFF” effort and expand in the future. Gerard said one goal is to eventually become an Academy Award qualifying festival.

The film festival continues through Feb. 28.

Brad Allen