

Grass Valley, Nevada City host Wild & Scenic Film Festival

HIGHLIGHTS

More than 140 films will be screened among six venues through Sunday

This year's theme is 'A Change of Course'

Organizers hope to raise awareness of human impact on environment





BY LORI KORLESKI RICHARDSON

Special to The Bee

More than a river runs through the Wild and Scenic Film Festival, which begins Thursday night, Jan. 14, and continues through Sunday, Jan. 16, at various venues in Nevada City and Grass Valley.

The festival, the major fundraiser for the South Yuba River Citizens League – known as SYRCL and pronounced “circle” – presents more than 140 films of varying lengths, from amateur to professional, animation to live action, all with the aim to raise awareness of what effect humans have on the environment.

Melinda Booth, organizer of the festival, was able to take a short break from her heady schedule to tell a bit about the four-day event.

Q: How did the festival come about?

A: Back in 1983, SYRCL was founded by a group concerned about the proposed building of a number of dams along the South Yuba River. The river was granted Wild and Scenic status in 1999, and the group wanted to continue to recover California’s wild salmon and to protect and restore the Yuba River.

Q: When did the film festival start?

A: It began in 2003, and it’s been yearly since then. We’re in our 14th year!

Q: Who chooses the films?

A: Ultimately, I make the decision about which films will be shown each year, but we have a program committee who reviews the submitted films, and each film is viewed by three people on the committee. This year, we received 450 submissions, and pared them down to 140, some of which are shown in our schools program. Nineteen are premieres.

Q: What are the criteria for the films to be included?

A: We look for environmental and adventure films, usually documentaries, but we’re open to narrative films as well. Each year has a theme, and this year’s is “A Change of Course.” We’re looking for films that tell really great stories. Because of that, we do accept films that

have less-spectacular cinematography if they tell an important or inspiring story.

Q: What is your favorite movie out of the premieres of the festival this year?

A: That's like choosing a favorite child! If I had to choose, I would choose "Sonic Sea," a film that reveals the impact of industrial and military ocean noise on whales and other marine life. It addresses an issue that is often overlooked and presents the subject in an engaging and inspiring way

Q: How many people does the festival attract?

A: We had 5,500 people at the festival last year, and our educational outreach program the week before had 1,200 youths participate. With the film tour events after the festival, we reach up to 35,000 people.

Q: Speaking of youths, what is the role of children for the festival?

A: Our school programs are divided into K through 3 and grades 4-8; during the festival, we have family/kid films Saturday morning. Only two films overlap these two events. The school program is more educational; the Saturday morning films are more for fun.

Q: Why Grass Valley/Nevada City instead of a more metropolitan venue?

A: SYRCL is based here, because of the river, and Grass Valley and Nevada City are the two largest towns. We started off in Nevada City, but adding Grass Valley was a way for us to include more people in the activities.

Q: How large is SYRCL?

A: We have 3,500 active members and volunteers, and a staff of about 20 full and part time. I say "about," because three are AmeriCorps workers and five, including me, work on the film festival year-round.

Q: The film tour and other upcoming events: Are they mini versions of what's presented at the film festival?

A: The film festival is our biggest fundraiser for our year-round conservation effort. The tour came about when we reached out to other organizations and asked if they would like to put on an event over a night or two, with films geared to each organization. Let us help you bring this to your community.

Q: Would you say this festival leans more to the wild, or the scenic?

A: Interesting question! I'm not sure how to answer. ... In terms of film, I think we offer a little of both. We have other events that think outside the box, such as the pedal-powered stage to make the speakers work, so some of the ideas are a little bit wild, in a positive and fun way.

WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

When: Opens Thursday, Jan. 14, with an art reception at 4:30 p.m.; through 10 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 17. Locals appreciation night is 7 p.m. Monday, Jan. 18

Where: Six venues in Grass Valley and Nevada City; headquarters, National Hotel, 211 Broad St., Nevada City

Cost: \$8-\$30 for tickets for individual events and sessions; \$65-\$375 for festival passes; most seating is first-come, first-served; many festival activities are free.

Information: www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org; a first-timers guide provides an overview

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