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Film festival seeks to inspire environmental activism

Renzo Downey, Reporter

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With the first night sold out and the second on its way, the 2016 Wild and Scenic Film Festival will showcase two nights of films on environmental sustainability at the Evanston Ecology Center.

The Evanston Environmental Association, which hosts the Evanston chapter of the festival, will show two different film lineups Feb. 5 and Feb. 19. Due to the festival's success over the past few years — spurred by social media advertisements — the EEA plans to expand the festival to a bigger venue in 2017, EEA president Dick Peach said.

“Right now our seating is limited to 110 people,” he said. “I could’ve sold probably twice that number of seats this year the way it looks.”

The board has considered upgrading but wanted to see if popularity continued to rise before it made a decision, Peach said.

“Next year, we may have to look into doing it someplace like the auditorium at Rotary International or some other venue,” Peach said. “There are so many good films that I’d hate to not show some of them, but there just aren’t enough hours, enough space to do it.”

The festival, founded in January 2003 by the South Yuba River Citizens League in Nevada City, California, seeks to inspire environmental activism, Peach said. The Nevada City festival features more than 110 films and then rents out the videos to other nonprofit organizations nationwide, he said. EEA receives a list of 35 to 40 films to select from to fit into their two 75-minute screenings, he said.

“We go through them and divide them up into categories and review them,” Peach said. “They bill us for those two 75-minute plugs of films, but we decide which films we’re going to show based on what we think will be of interest to people here.”

Peach said the EEA board sifts through the films to cut out long or boring ones and curates its selection for the Evanston community.

EEA board member Jim Chilsen said this year’s films range from adventurous and humorous to serious and dramatic, each aiming to spark action.

“What the film fest tries to do is inspire people and encourage them to bring about positive change in their communities,” Chilsen said. “You can’t really work for a better world until you’re inspired by it.”

Kumar Jensen, the acting sustainability manager at the city's Office of Sustainability, which helps city departments and organizations coordinate and collaborate on environmental projects, said he hopes people will be inspired to take part in a "larger campaign" after seeing how national and global issues matter to the community.

"The broad range of the types of films that are shown at the film festival help people understand, not just in the Evanston context but in other places around the country, around the world, how the different issues are related to each other," Jensen said. "We are then hopeful that they will ... understand how some of those also have local implications."

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