

# festival wraps

## YORKTON SHORT FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL (5/22-25/03)



BY CALVIN DANIELS

IT WAS A BIG NIGHT for Audrey Mehler and her documentary *The Boys of Buchenwald*, taking home five Golden Sheaf Awards, including Best of Festival of the Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival in Saskatchewan. The film, which focuses on a group of Jewish men who survived the Holocaust at the Buchenwald internment camp and formed a lifelong bond following the war, was up for six awards this year. In addition to the Best of Festival honours, the film captured Best Documentary History, Best Direction (non-dramatic) for Mehler, Best Editing and Best Original Music.

Mehler said success at Yorkton, which, in its 56th year, is the longest running festival in North America,

was a surprise. "I tried not to get my hopes up," she said, but added there were encouraging signs throughout the festival. "People sought us out. They'd seen the film and loved it." Mehler said it is gratifying to "be recognized for something you believe in." She said believing in a project is at the heart of any successful documentary. "You have to have a lot of empathy for the people." For Mehler, the key to the film's success came from its compelling story. "These boys were uprooted from their families, from their homes," she said. Once in the concentration camp, they were subjected to terrible horrors and hardship. After the war, they ended up in France and began rebuilding their shattered lives, and through the process became lifelong friends. "They stayed in touch with each other because they meant so much to each other," said Mehler. She found out about the story when she was told of a reunion of the "boys" in Jerusalem. "It was explained to me that it could be one of the last reunions." So she packed up and headed to Israel to video it. When she

returned to Canada she began the search for funding to complete the project. While lack of full funding made for "a smaller-scale film" than originally planned, *The Boys of Buchenwald* has aired on the History Channel in Canada, and "we hope we can sell it around the world so everybody can see it," Mehler says.

The Best of Saskatchewan Award was presented to *Ebola Wars: The Nurses of Gulu*. The film was the first for Regina director David Belluz. "I think it has a special meaning in the sense this is a very Saskatchewan production," said Belluz, who pointed out the film was made possible by and aired on the Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN). "So, in a sense, it's come full circle, which is great." Belluz, who dropped out of journalism at the University of Regina to become a film director, said his career has focused on Africa from the outset. The first lure was the story of children soldiers. "I was fascinated and terrified by what these children were doing," he said. In several countries children are being abducted and



Audrey Mehler's THE BOYS OF BUCHENWALD

trained to become killers. While in Uganda an Ebola epidemic broke out, and suddenly a new story captured Belluz's attention. The award-winning film chronicles the experiences of several nurses who volunteered to work in the isolation wards in Uganda hospitals in October 2000. The film was a difficult one, subject-wise, for the first-time director. "The wards weren't a lot of fun. There were a lot of people who were very sick and a lot of the people were in a lot of pain." Belluz has since been back to Uganda, following child soldiers over a two-year period to make a film that will air on SCN in September. "If not for SCN, I probably wouldn't be here," he said, adding it has provided more than financial support for his projects.

Other multiple winners at this year's festival were Brenda Longfellow's *Tina in Mexico* and Justin Simms's *Asbore*, which both picked up three awards, and *Nina's Muse* and *The*

*Sacred Balance: The Matrix of Life*, each captured two awards. Well-known Saskatchewan-born actor Gordon Tootoosis was also recognized during the festival for his long career in television and film. The award was presented by ACTRA at a noon luncheon. "Gordon is an extraordinary actor," said Sean Hoy, president of the Saskatchewan branch of ACTRA, when presenting the first award of its kind from the association. Tootoosis, who was born and raised on the Poundmaker Reserve, was also presented with a lifetime membership in ACTRA. "When I look back, I think I've been kind of a bulldozer clearing the way. It's been rough, but I've enjoyed it," said Tootoosis, adding maybe because of his efforts and success, today "it's a little easier for young Aboriginal actors." Tootoosis said an award that recognizes his career has made him reflect on his body of work, something he rarely does. "The fact is, I don't really consider my work,

work. It's something I enjoy doing but it's a great honour to have my peers recognizing my efforts over the years."

Festival chairperson Janet Hill said she was pleased with this year's event as she helped to clear tables following the Golden Sheaf Awards ceremony. "I think it was fantastic," she said. "We had about four times as many students as last year for the emerging filmmaker's day." Mini Cinema was also popular as people took an opportunity to preview the 443 entries in the festival. "We added to the number of booths, and they were always full," she said. As for the awards gala, Hill said it is the highlight of the festival each year. "The production is a big part of Yorkton. The festival wouldn't be the same without it," she said.

*CALVIN DANIELS IS THE ASSISTANT EDITOR AND SENIOR REPORTER WITH YORKTON THIS WEEK. HIS ARTICLES HAVE BEEN WIDELY PUBLISHED IN SEVEN COUNTRIES AND HE HAS WON 15 FIRST-PLACE SASKATCHEWAN WEEKLY NEWSPAPER AWARDS.*



**WORLDWIDE  
SHORT FILM  
FESTIVAL** (6/3-8/03)

BY LINDSAY GIBB

**THE ADS FOR** the Worldwide Short Film Festival (WSFF) claimed, "Long Is Bad, Short Is Good," and yet there was no evident animosity against the longer-form films at this festival. The slogan simply emphasized the pride the filmmakers and festival programmers hold in the shorter form that isn't seen as much by mainstream audiences. But as actor Eric McCormack said at the screening of his film *Pirates*, making a short can be a stepping stone on the way to becoming a feature director. McCormack himself is in the process of writing the screenplay for his feature-directing debut as a result of the impression he made with his short.

Other films that were screened at this year's festival have pushed their filmmakers on to full-time director status. A year ago, Jonathan Hayes was one of four finalists vying for recognition

in WSFF's pitch session. He won the session and though there was no monetary award, it created momentum that led him to a grant from Bravo!Fact. And from there the ball just kept rolling. His bright and hilarious film *The School* was screened at this year's festival. Based on a short story of the same name by American author Donald Barthelme and adapted by Hayes, *The School* is the story of a teacher who is diligently trying to teach his students how to be responsible when taking care of living things in the classroom; with sad yet intensely funny results. It won the Audience Award.

Brad Peyton who, after showing his 2002 film *Evelyn: The Cutest Evil Dead Girl* at a number of different festivals, has been asked to write and direct his first feature, *The Spider and the Fly*, for Tom Hanks's company, Playtone. *Evelyn*, the story of an undead girl looking to