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Dufferin Film Festival wraps third year with strong turnout and new family programming

Written By JOSHUA DRAKES

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Dufferin Film Festival has wrapped its third annual edition after a weekend of Canadian short films, filmmaker Q&As and community events that organizers say exceeded expectations.

The Aug. 14 to 16 festival brought 19 Canadian short films to Orangeville's historic Opera House, featuring a wide range of documentary, drama, comedy, horror, animation and coming-of-age stories. The lineup included films exploring identity, grief, family, belonging, cultural heritage and personal transformation.

Among the films screened were ?Mica, I see myself in you,? ?The Little Town That Could,? ?Serenity,? ?Conditions of Release? and many more throughout the weekend.

Festival director Kelly McDowell described the 2026 festival as a great success.

?I honestly think it went above and beyond our expectations for this year, knowing that we had a completely new team in all new positions,? she said. ?We all feel really, really good about it; the feedback has been phenomenal.?

The festival also introduced several new elements this year, including a family-friendly daytime screening on Saturday. The new screening was very popular despite being a daytime slot, drawing in families and kids.

The shorter program was designed to make the festival more accessible to younger audiences, featuring animation, puppetry and age-appropriate films. The approximately one-hour event also included a filmmaker Q&A, with children participating and asking questions.

One film that particularly resonated with younger audience members was ?Hive Mindset,? a local documentary about a beekeeper who is allergic to bees.

The film was also a world premiere, giving local audiences an opportunity to see the work alongside its filmmakers. Tinker Teleports and Lemming's First Christmas provided additional animation and youth-oriented programming.

Another new addition was a networking afterparty at the Orangeville Public Library called Dufferin Film Festival After Dark. The event featured music provided by Orangeville-based Dufferin DJs, a performance from Citrus Dance Inc., and live painting by Ricky Schaede.

Rather than functioning as a traditional large-scale party, the event was designed as a relaxed space for filmmakers, audiences and members of the local arts community to connect. Organizers said the event achieved that goal, with attendees staying late to socialize, listen to music and network.

McDowell said that the event was successful, and the library was supportive.

?It's the first time for Orangeville that something like this was done,? she said. ?What we wanted to happen, happened. We didn't want it to be a big rumbling party. We wanted it to be a networking opportunity, and we wanted an accessible venue. So this was absolutely the perfect place to do it.?

?From the feedback that we garnered from the library at the time when we closed, they were really happy with everything. We're going to meet with them, obviously, and get some more feedback on how we can make it even better. But other than that, it really was the relaxed networking event with some dancing and music and excitement that we wanted, and the right vibe for sure,? McDowell added.

Saturday night proved to be the busiest screening of the weekend, with the festival's first themed film block focusing on comedy horror drawing a particularly strong crowd. The post-screening networking continued well into the evening.

The festival also saw its all-access VIP passes sell out, while filmmakers travelled from across Canada to participate, including one filmmaker from Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Organizers received strong feedback from both filmmakers and audiences, with the quality of the films and the overall festival experience receiving particularly positive reactions.

?I had comments from people that felt like every year it's just getting higher and higher calibre in terms of? the films that are being submitted and the filmmakers that are attending for our audience members,? McDowell said. ?The filmmakers loved attending. The film audience really enjoyed it. We hope to improve and do more next year.?

With a new volunteer team successfully managing this year's expanded programming, organizers are already looking toward 2027.

Future goals include increasing ticket sales, expanding access to the festival and continuing to build DFF into a destination for Canadian filmmakers and film enthusiasts.