

All work and no play make filmmakers dull boys ? and girls



By Brock Weir

Connor Parkinson, a Grade 8 student at Aurora Senior Public School is no stranger to hard work.

But, the budding filmmaker, whose film 'All Work and No Play' played in town last week as the York Region Multimedia Film Festival Circuit made its way through Aurora, lives by the very phrase that completes that adage.

Together with classmate Matthew Connell-Tomes, Connor set out to make a video to see how people of his generation could make their lives better and achieve all their goals.

'A lot of people were talking about things they want, and I thought working hard is the answer,' says Connor. 'Something just doesn't pop out of the blue. Working hard is really the essence of life. It is how you get your laptop, it's how you save up for your phones, and it is just how you achieve things.'

With their idea in hand, Connor and Matthew took their idea through the school and into the wider community asking people what working hard meant to them. They collected a variety of answers and they took their material to create a film.

Connor first got bitten by the filmmaking bug as a Grade 7 student working with his fellow classmates. Since then, he has made many different movies by himself and with others. With this as his first public showing, he hopes there will be many more screenings to come.

'I am definitely going to enter this contest in years to come,' he says. 'I really love filmmaking. It is something to express creativity with. It is very opening and beneficial for me, and I just have a great time with it.'

Connor and Matthew's film was among many films made by Aurora students which were part of last week's screening. These films covered such wide-ranging topics as getting to the root of bullying within schools to music videos.

Following a brief intermission, films tackled more mature themes such as urban violence, racism and racial profiling, abortion and religion, a comic send-up of 1970s feminism, and good old-fashioned sex.

Many of these filmmakers were mainstays of the York Region Multimedia Film Festival who held their first public screenings at the festivals as teens and have gone on to study film and build professional careers.

One such filmmaker is Alexandra Antonovich who, rather than being a writer and director on the film 'Made for TV' was able to

practice her passion as a director of photography.

'Made for TV' covers a hapless young man about town who can't quite get the girl. After striking out one last time, he goes to bed looking at a poster on his wall depicting the TV show 'Buddies' (following six friends living in New York. Sound familiar?). When he wakes up, he finds himself in a sitcom of his own, which is, to him, not that funny.

Like Connor, Alexandra is no stranger to hard work and spoke about some of the challenges it took the crew to complete the finished product.

'It is great to see it done,' she says. 'We went through a lot. Once you see it on the screen, you think, 'Wow! We actually did it.''

A native of Russia, Alexandra studied at Aurora Grove Public School and Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School before studying filmmaking at Humber College.

'My interest in filmmaking started when I took a film course in elementary school and I fell in love with the whole aspect of how films were made and animation,' she says. 'From there, I knew I wanted to be doing this. I definitely love the lighting and the cinematography, and that is what keeps me coming back.'

What keeps Alex Broughton coming back for more each year is the challenge. The Aurora filmmaker, whose entries last year received a bevy of awards, is back this year with 'Grasping for Straws,' a multi-character film that upends typical views of race, family and poverty.

'It was a film about poverty that put me into poverty because we shot it on actual film,' Broughton jokes, but not entirely. 'It cost a lot of money, and we ended up getting a light burn in the footage, which is one of the reasons people choose to shoot digital over film. The expense can be costly, but we lost 20 per cent of the footage.'

What was left, however, was salvageable.

'I wanted to create something raw looking, and I wanted to experiment on film,' he says. 'Every movie that I make is usually a different genre and leads to experimenting with something completely new and this was four acts and playing on audience expectations.'

If people see themselves depicted in certain negative ways, he says, it often creates a negative stereotype on particular neighbourhoods and contributes to cycles of gun violence and poverty-related crime.

'Crime is really a result of poverty, and you can put Band-Aid solutions all you want, but to really solve the issue you need to know what the issue is that needs to be solved,' he says. 'It shows that poverty exists in our own back yard and we're not really doing too much to change that. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow and where there is a place where light should be shone, light should be shone.'