

Young and established filmmakers have more chances to take part in York Region Multimedia Film Fest

By Brock Weir

Stepping back into the past at Georgina's Pioneer Village doesn't often provide a chance to take a significant step forward.

A possible exception is filmmaker John Watson. It was there, while trying to book the facility for a film shoot, he discovered during a chance meeting that the York Region Multimedia Film Festival was set to launch.

"When I heard about it, my first thought was, "I really wish this would have existed when I was in school," he says. "As soon as I heard about it, I saw lots of opportunities. I saw the opportunity to provide experience and an entry point into the industry, validation of hard work, and all the things a young filmmaker needs."

The Festival was founded by the Multimedia Film Development Council of York Region along with Family Services of York Region as a way to provide residents an outlet to express themselves, spread the word, and make a difference in their communities.

Fast forward a few short years, and Mr. Watson is now executive director of the organization, taking the helm this past summer.

Knowing first-hand the opportunities such an organization can provide to young filmmakers, Mr. Watson kept this in mind when he looked for ways to make his own mark on the Festival. Long-term goals, he says, include creating more career training opportunities, providing job experiences and contracts for emerging filmmakers, and real-world experience.

"Another goal is to raise the profile of the Region," he says. "Historically, there has always been this problem of talent feeling they need to leave to have a career. Things have changed quite a bit over the years, but I think there is still room to post the profile of York Region and the opportunities that are here. I can see this organization playing a huge role in retaining digital talent and nurturing it and giving people incentive to live and work here."

As March drew to a close, the final film submissions were made from emerging and established filmmakers from across York Region, including students and residents in Aurora, King and Vaughan. Submissions were not limited to individuals either. Organizations such as Eating Disorders of York Region also heeded the call, making their own submissions hoping to make the grade.

Although Mr. Watson says he hasn't yet had an opportunity to view all the submissions himself, and each film will go through an adjudication panel, he says he has been struck by the quality of the films he has had a chance to see, a quality which improves year after year.

Interestingly, 2014 has yielded an unusual amount of music videos, he says.

"There are some very innovative and unusual films we have received," he says. "That might be in how we have done our outreach for submissions. We have been implementing online marketing, which is new for the organization and we are finding that we are reaching new people this year."

The online world is taking a significant role in expanding the film festival this year, as the moving image is making room for the still. York Region shutterbugs over the age of 13 are invited to make their submissions over Instagram (tagged with #EpicYR and @MMFFYR) for a chance to win a Grand Prize of \$500 and, of course, the glory, as weekly winners are selected. Entries will be accepted through April 28.

Although winners in the traditional video contest will be awarded at a special gala near the end of May, this year, in addition to trophies, each winner will also receive a cash prize. How much they receive, however, could be up to you. The Film Festival is

currently crowdsourcing their cash prize and are accepting contributions from the public to make it something truly special. More information on how to donate can be found at www.yorkregionfilmfestival.com.

For Mr. Watson, crowdsourcing was both a way to engage the community, but also provide an added layer of incentive.

"In my research and talking to filmmakers, one of the motivations to participate in something is a cash prize," he says. "That was a pretty consistent answer and I thought it would be a really great initiative to crowd fund the prize."

Donations will be accepted through April 22.

To catch this year's winning films, the York Region Multimedia Film Festival will be hitting the road, beginning May 5. It stops at the Aurora Cultural Centre for an evening screening on Wednesday, May 7 from 7 ? 9 p.m. The festival will play Vaughan City Hall on Monday, May 12 from 7 ? 9 p.m., and the King City branch of the King Public Library on Tuesday, May 13 from 6.30 ? 8.30 p.m.