

BIFF Turns Ten

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 30 December 2015 07:52



The Beaufort International Film Festival Celebrates a Milestone – A Look Back With Executive Director Ron Tucker

Interview by Mark Shaffer



Last year more than 70 filmmakers – writers, producers, directors, editors, cinematographers and actors – traveled to Beaufort in support of their selected projects. A whole bunch more simply showed up to see what all the buzz was about. Familiar faces mingle with the rookies, friendships are rekindled, partnerships are formed, and the post-screening pub-crawls pass into legend.

Before, during and after these filmmakers from around the nation and the globe dish out their love for BIFF and the town of Beaufort through a constant flood of social media to followers, fans, friends and family who in turn pay it forward. And on and on it goes. Each year the buzz builds and builds like seven-year cicadas warming up for the main event. And if last year's results are any indicator – and there is no reason to believe otherwise – the 10th edition of South

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Carolina's largest film festival will be, as one filmmaker put it, "Epic, indeed."

BIFF takes place over four days each February but Ron and Rebecca Tucker spend the entire year piecing this massive, delicate puzzle together. When Ron finally finds a bit of time to sit down and reflect on the first decade of the fest, Rebecca is out taking care of pressing BIFF business.

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Mark Shaffer: Take us back a decade, as the first festival is about to become reality. Had to be nerve wracking.

Ron Tucker: I remember that pretty clearly. It was kind of like "destination unknown"



because we'd not done one before, though we'd been working on it for a while. The idea came up in 2004 when we had the Beaufort Regional Film Commission that we created to try and bring the movie business back to Beaufort. Once the idea of a film festival began to take shape we needed a venue. The theater [on Lady's Island] had just closed and Paul Trask allowed us to use it. It came complete with a concession bar and 35-millimeter projectors. That was before flash drives and the like and we had filmmakers who wanted to exhibit in 35 millimeter, Beta cam SP, Digi-Beta and more.

MS: The end days of analog: way too many formats.

RT: Right, but we had them all. And for the first two years our first screenings were at 7:30 in the morning. So people shouldn't complain about starting at 9 like we do now. Even so, we still had a theater full of people. That first year we also had a lot of filmmakers come that we didn't know were coming and I hadn't built in any time for Q&A. So scheduling was kind of a nightmare, but I really learned a lot and we've never gotten off schedule again.

2005 we had a good turnout of about 500 total in attendance. I left feeling that we'd pulled off something grand with 500 people. We had an opening ceremony at the Chamber of Commerce with about 35 people and I thought, wow, what a great turnout (laughs)

MS: So how many are you expecting for this year's opening?

RT: More than 700 and a four day total of around 10,000. We've grown pretty substantially in ten years.

MS: You had filmmakers show up that first year and you can't seem to get rid of them.

RT: (laughs) Actor/writer/director Gary Weeks (above, with Rebecca Tucker) has been here every year since. Actually, his film won that year but he couldn't make it. We had this little mini-awards ceremony under a tent out in Habersham and there were maybe 35 people. I remember trying to get Gary on the phone. Nothing has changed. If you call Gary Weeks you still get his voice mail. (Laughs)

When I did finally get him he was really excited. He was up against some big names but his little indy film won. And that started a long ten-year run of Gary Weeks with a film or a screenplay in competition. And that first year Margaret Ford Rogers and Marcia Rae won best screenplay and they've continued to have a good run at the festival.

MS: There's no doubt it's become something of a family affair over the years. What

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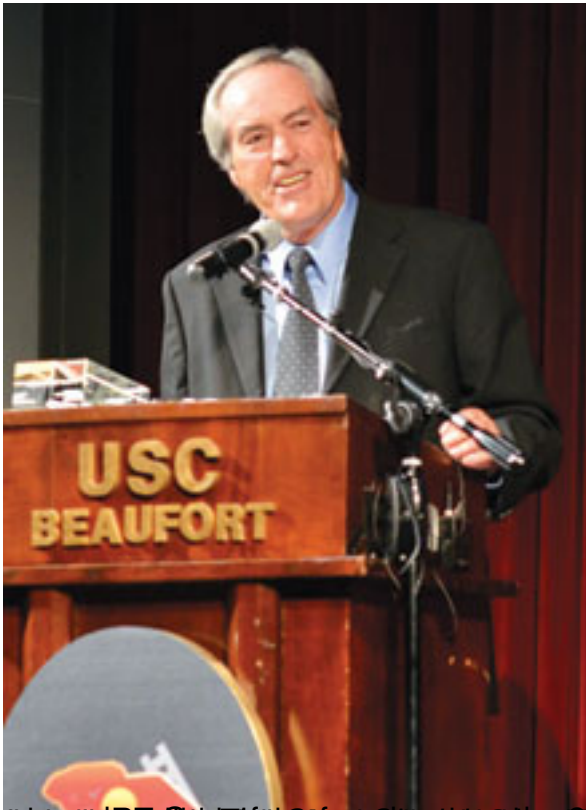
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The 10th Annual BIFF Festival is just around the corner and we are excited to announce that the festival will be celebrating its 10th anniversary. The festival is a great opportunity for filmmakers to showcase their work and for audiences to enjoy some of the best independent films. The festival is held in the heart of the city and is a great way to spend a weekend. The festival is a great opportunity for filmmakers to showcase their work and for audiences to enjoy some of the best independent films. The festival is held in the heart of the city and is a great way to spend a weekend. The festival is a great opportunity for filmmakers to showcase their work and for audiences to enjoy some of the best independent films. The festival is held in the heart of the city and is a great way to spend a weekend.