

COMMUNITY

Chicken roping to “vanishing moments” Amarillo hosts its inaugural Film Festival

Amarillo International Film Festival held Oct. 10-12


 by **BRIANNA MAESTAS**
SEPTEMBER 27, 2024



Photo courtesy of the United States Chicken Roping Association.

The [Amarillo International Film Festival](#) (AIFF) will host its inaugural festival Oct. 10-12 at Arts in the Sunset.

The event will include over 30 films from local and international filmmakers. There will be a VIP event held on Oct. 10 at 5:30 p.m., including a reception and screening of “For the Record” followed by a Q&A moderated by Panhandle PBS’s Karen Welch, Canadian Record Editor Laurie Ezzell Brown and filmmaker Heather Courtney.

Kate McSwain, president of the Amarillo Film Society, said the festival received not only local applications but also international film submissions from Peru, Haiti, Canada, England, Spain and Mexico.

“I mean, that’s pretty International, and the quality of the films is wonderful. Is fabulous. What I’m excited about is you’re going to come and see films here that have not been shown commercially ... and some of these films, probably, this is your only opportunity to see them in Amarillo,” McSwain said.

According to McSwain, she established the Amarillo Film Society intending to create a film festival at the forefront, to create an outlet for local filmmakers and encourage international connections.

Sherman Bass, the AIFF administrator, said two years ago, while in an interview for his current position as Film Commissioner for Visit Amarillo, he discussed the development of a film festival in Amarillo and prepared for the project to start in 2025. However, after meeting McSwain and the Film Society, he realized they could join forces to achieve their similar goal sooner.

“We just all kind of ended up on the same team, and here we are a year and a half later with the film festival,” Bass said.

Both spoke of the quality and range of submissions, both locally and internationally, some more unexpected than others.

Local filmmaker Cristian Medellin, director of “Melody of Vanishing Moments,” said he had been interested in film since childhood when he would rent movies from the library.

The director said he was watching a film by the name of “Persona,” and his AIFF narrative short submission was inspired by Sven Nykvist’s shot of the main actresses.

“The image is of Liv Ullman, who is the main actress. It’s a close-up of her face, and she’s leaning down, and there’s like a white background, and she’s silhouetted, so just by looking at that kind of inspired me. I wanted

to recreate something close to that within my film,” Medellin said.

From that single frame, Medellin created a story about a woman’s inner turmoil as she struggles to understand her family’s sacrifice regarding her worsening disability. In the film, the woman meets a man who hopes to convince her to act with caution, but the woman just can’t seem to remember why the conversation is so important.

According to Medellin, he and his fellow creators of “Melody of Vanishing Moments” established the organization Core Filmmakers Collective to create more opportunities for local individuals interested in film.

“It started as six of us were just like, ‘We see nothing happening in Amarillo; let’s just make our own opportunities for ourselves,’” Medellin said about Core Filmmakers Collective.

Through the AIFF, Medellin hopes to create connections with others locally, internationally and globally who are interested in film to learn from and share connections with.

“Essentially, Amarillo is going to benefit from the film festival, and that’s something that we need, and hopefully that’s something that people start seeing, that filmmaking isn’t just a Hollywood thing. It’s happening all around us, and it creates opportunities all around,” Medellin said.

Another local filmmaker, Randall Whipple, producer of “The Clash at Cactus Cove,” said the short film, created in partnership with the [United States Chicken Roping Association](#) to be showcased in the documentary shorts AIFF category, was more of a “mockumentary” for its comedic take on chicken roping.

“We did our first chicken roping, and we thought that it would be fun to film that, and we actually built a plot around it, and we brought in some actors, and we worked really hard at this to be somewhat serious about the filming of it, but yet it’s an absolutely, totally unserious thing altogether,” Whipple said.

The film follows two main characters, the “World Champion Chicken Ropers,” as they enter another high-stakes chicken roping tournament and compete to keep their title.

According to Whipple, the organization was collecting footage for social media marketing of the first-ever chicken roping event when, by “happenstance,” they learned about the AIFF and decided to create a comedic seven-minute documentary out of the footage for submission.

Whipple said “The Clash at Cactus Cove” was not only filmed on the local Cactus Cove properties but also “recruited” as many as 60 individuals to participate in the filming process.

"I really hope that the community takes a look at this and takes the opportunity to enjoy it, and takes the opportunity to recognize that these efforts that the Film Commission is doing are fruitful and will be fruitful in many ways. The number one thing that I see the commission doing as part of this film festival is the recognition that Amarillo is a place to come film your movie," Whipple said.

When asked what he was most looking forward to during the festival, Whipple said, "It would be cool if we won our category. So I'm really hoping nobody else enters our category."

Bass said for its inaugural year, the festival received over 70 submissions. Four volunteers served as the secret selection committee that evaluated each submission. Each member scored each film independently. The highest scores in the narrative and documentary features determined the top three accepted submissions in those categories.

For the narrative film block, narrative short block, student short block and documentary short block categories, the committee judged each piece and then selected those with the highest overall score that could fit within the 90-minute time block.

Each film was judged on nine criteria categories: originality, creativity, direction, writing, cinematography, performances, production value, pacing, structure and sound/ music and scored them 1 through 10.

Following this, Bass said, the secret jury of 15 international members "took over," and three member juries for each category scored each film independently, utilizing the same nine criteria. The scores were later combined, "and those awards will be announced Saturday night at the awards ceremony."

The five award categories include the Audience Choice Award which will be determined and presented for each category, Best Animated Film Award, a "special award" sponsored by the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health and a "Special Award" for the Greater Amarillo Filmmaker.

Bass said that on the day of the film festival, the Audience Choice Awards will be judged similarly. "They won't have nine criteria. But if you go in and watch the student or the narrative shorts. There's 11 films, and at the end of the last film, there'll be a QR code, snap picture, and you'll rate each film with 1 to 10 stars, not all the criteria, just however you choose to do it."

According to McSwain, in addition to the impact the festival could create for local filmmakers, she also wanted to impact the local economy and felt it was important for the festival to collaborate with local businesses.

“Everything is as local ...that was very important, that not only is it an International Film Festival, but it really is grounded in everything that’s local,” McSwain said.

Whipple said that through the filming, they were able to further their monetary impact on the community through collaborations with local businesses. They believe that establishing AIFF will allow more opportunities for film companies to come to Amarillo.

Local business collaborations include hiring local food trucks to provide food and beverages during the viewing events, the awards designed and created by local glass artists Bird Blind Designs, the event posters created by local graphic designer Gabrielle Bivins and AIFF T-shirts created by Free Cheese Prints, a local printing company.

Bass said that AIFF is already making adjustments and planning ahead for next year’s festival.

Tickets and the schedule for the AIFF are available on their [website](#).

Transparency: The Amarillo Tribune’s Web Producer, Phoebe Terry, is a committee member and jurist for the Amarillo International Film Festival. Phoebe did not contribute to the creation or editing of this story.