

Second annual Stratford Winter Film Festival themed around love and family

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The second annual Stratford Winter Film Festival (SWFF) is shaping up as the intrepid trio of founders, Craig Sangster, Leslie Marsh and Bruce MacInnis, finalize the theme and the curated films.

The festival is planned for Family Day weekend, Feb. 14-17, 2025, which also includes Valentine's Day. The timing presented themes of love and family in all of its forms as the foundation for four days of programming.

The inaugural year brought out a fantastic mix in demographic from seniors to families, and it is expected the film selection will appeal to these same people.

"We are super happy with and loyal to the demographic that came out to SWFF year one, and we are deliberately serving them. We're always happy to have more people but we will do anything to keep those that showed loyalty to us and, if anything, we will expand it," said Sangster.

There will be 12 films screened over four days with screenings held at three different venues. St. James Anglican Church, St Andrew's Church and the city hall auditorium will each play host with three films per day. The carefully curated films were selected with the help of advisors whittling down a list of over 50 potentials to the 12 that will be presented.

"We came up with the theme, which is a natural for the days we are running SWFF this year. We then spread that word to our trusted advisors and they come back with how things fit within the theme and other things. From 60 films, we narrowed it down to the 12 we are screening," said Sangster.

New for year two of the festival will be a free shuttle bus to take festival goers from venue to venue. This will be beneficial for those who prefer not to drive or if the winter walk is too brisk. Films will be scheduled for evenings in order to avoid light pollution that degrades the film-viewing experience.

It may seem daunting to screen 12 films in four days, but no one is expecting anyone to try to see them all. People are encouraged to spend time in the city eating drinking and discovering the great businesses in downtown Stratford.

"Each venue is screening three times a night for the four days. We don't want to have the message that you have to see all 12 films. You can if you want to, but you don't have to. You might want to see eight super great movies that hit your target and go have dinner," said Sangster. "Sometimes people need an invitation to do something, so we are extending that invitation."

There will be tie-ins to local featured business such as Mercer Beer Hall offering a special package for out-of-town guests or Relic Lobby Bar with a specialty cocktail that promises to be as good as last year's Mary Pickford cocktail. As preparations for the festival are underway, more information on pairings will be published on the website.

"There will be hotel deals and B and B's that are enthu-



(BECKY GEAN PHOTO)

THEMES OF LOVE

The second annual Stratford Winter Film Festival is approaching for Family Day Weekend 2025. The four day festival will feature twelve films over the weekend in the theme of love and family.

siastic and on board. Matilda Swanson will be participating and Relic Lobby Bar as well, and of course, our key sponsor this year is TD Bank. We will be doing a couple events with them," said Marsh.

Attendance will be through the purchase of passes again this year, however, there are two options to choose from. Passes are \$150 for four days or \$80 for two days.

"So, we have a four-day pass for Friday to Monday for \$150 or for \$80 a pass for Friday, Saturday or a pass for Sunday, Monday. Passes are available on our website," said MacInnis.

"This is a marvelous Christmas present. It is wholesome, it is good, which is now rare," added Sangster.

Save the date, there will be a free community family event from SWFF to look forward to. More information will be revealed as the time approaches.

As a non-profit, this festival is volunteer driven and anyone interested in volunteering can email shannon@stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca. For more information about the second annual event, visit stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca.

Editor's note: Lisa Chester, the author of this article,

serves on the advisory board of the Stratford Winter Film Festival.

Optimist Club of Downie Inc.

OPTI-CASH CALENDAR DRAW

Dec. 01 Nancy Ready, St. Marys	\$500.00
(2025 Opti Cash Calendar Early Bird Winner)	
Dec. 01 Wild Hog Market, Stratford	\$50.00
Dec. 02 Joan Alderman, Lakeside	\$50.00
Dec. 03 Steve Cubberly, St. Marys	\$50.00
Dec. 04 Debbie Hunter, Stratford	\$50.00
Dec. 05 Rita Reynen, St. Marys	\$50.00
Dec. 06 Jeremy & Christine Glogovic, Baden	\$50.00
Dec. 07 Ron & Pat Wouters, St. Pauls	\$200.00
Dec. 08 Dave Innes, Lakeside	\$50.00
Dec. 09 Mary Smith, St. Marys	\$50.00
Dec. 10 Ron Whaling, St. Pauls	\$50.00
Dec. 11 Katie Bossers, Stratford	\$50.00
Dec. 12 Todd Morris, Stratford	\$50.00
Dec. 13 Sebastian D'Amico, Oshawa	\$50.00

Rod Beattie virtually performs

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"Listening is the single most important thing to

customized and served at a location of the winner's choosing. His team promises to leave the kitchen in