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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2024-INFO-10
Date: March 1, 2024

Subject:

2023 Durham Region International Film Festival

Recommendation:

Receive for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Planning and Economic Development Committee of the 9th annual Durham Region International Film Festival (DRIFF) that took place in person on October 19 to 21 and online from October 21 to 28, 2023.

1.2 DRIFF's 2023 program included a gala event, film screenings, award ceremonies, and experiential activities. DRIFF hosted many local and international filmmakers, connecting them with audiences through post-screening question and answer periods, workshops, and networking events.

2. Background

2.1 DRIFF is a not-for-profit film festival rooted in the communities of Durham that engages a diverse network of audiences, filmmakers, and collaborators to promote film as a form of creative expression and a catalyst for community building.

- 2.2 The Economic Development and Tourism Division supports DRIFF through in-kind support, the purchase of advertising, and through promotional partnerships such as joint news releases and coverage on regional social media.
- 2.3 DRIFF is a vital piece of Durham's film sector ecosystem and through hundreds of volunteer hours it gives emerging filmmakers a platform to advance their creative work. DRIFF showcases films and filmmakers from Canada and across the globe; and encourages community connections through the power of cinema.
- 2.4 From the 146 films submitted, the festival organizers curated the submissions and showcased a diverse and inclusive line-up of 37 films. The top countries contributing films were Canada, USA, UK, Iran, Palestine, Jamaica, Germany, France, and China.
- 2.5 Two feature films with a Durham Region focus were screened in-person at DRIFF and each won an award:
 - a. *When Hope Breaks Through*, the People's Choice winner is the inspiring story of Mike Shoreman, a disabled paddleboarder from Whitby who sets out to raise awareness and funding for the youth mental health crisis in Canada by paddleboarding across all five Great Lakes.
 - b. *Purple Don't Cry*, winner of the Best Regional Film was shot in and around Durham and explored the complexities of Muslim identity and challenges that many Muslim youth face in western society.
- 2.6 The 2023 program featured documentaries, animation, shorts, and feature films, representing a variety of styles and genres. The breakdown was as follows:
 - a. Thursday, October 19: DRIFF events began at the Biltmore Theatre, Oshawa with a red-carpet experience and VIP reception. The short film *Primitive Times* (Germany) preceded the opening night feature, *Suze* (Canada).
 - b. Friday, October 20: events were held at the St Frances Centre, Ajax, with a pre-screening party that featured local food from three chefs based in Durham Region. This was followed by a panel discussion with film and television industry experts on finance, insurance, and distribution. The evening screenings were a short film, *Demon Box* (Canada) and feature films, *The Boy in the Woods* (Canada) and *When Hope Breaks Through* (Canada).
 - c. Saturday, October 21: DRIFF hosted two free workshops at the Biltmore Theatre: a fascinating look into the world of sound effects presented by Footsteps Post-Production Sound Inc., and a panel of industry professionals discussing the filmmaking process and careers in film. Following was a

ticketed event – the Homegrown Shorts Program – with seven Canadian films. The evening was complete with awards ceremonies and two feature films *Purple Don't Cry* (Canada), and *Egghead and Twinkie* (USA).

2.7 DRIFF 2023 attendance increased by 17 per cent over 2022.

3. Future Activities

3.1 In 2024, DRIFF plans to:

- a. Host DRIFF in a Jiff at RMG on four Fridays at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Oshawa) plus several screening events at the Whitby Public Library.
- b. Host the DRIFF three-day film festival from October 24 to 26 at Whitby Centennial Building (Whitby), St. Frances Centre for Community, Arts and Culture (Ajax), and the Biltmore Theatre (Oshawa).
- c. Continue their Durham Emerging Filmmaker Incubator program, which will provide one filmmaking team with \$10,000 in funding provided by DRIFF, the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation's Maada'ookii Committee, Shaftesbury, and Invest Durham - Film Durham, plus mentoring, in-kind services, and equipment to produce a short film.
- d. Market the festival nationally and internationally through social media, the website, and film industry connections; and
- e. Continue to seek funding from industry, community, government grant programs, and other sources.

4. Relationship to Strategic Plan

4.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

- a. Goal 3 – Economic prosperity
 - Priority 3.1 - Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business.
 - Priority 3.2 - Leverage Durham's prime geography, social infrastructure, and strong partnerships to foster economic growth.
 - Priority 3.4 - Capitalize on Durham's strengths in key economic sectors to attract high-quality jobs.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Each year the Durham Region International Film Festival fosters community pride, provides positive economic benefits, and shows how Durham Region is a welcoming and inclusive community.
- 5.2 Durham Region Economic Development and Tourism will continue to play a supporting role in this festival to highlight our film sector and grow and strengthen our creative industries.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Planning and
Economic Development