



Contact: Wendy Wilson, 570.840.0878

WWilson@WaverlyComm.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NORTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES 2019 LINEUP

From Producers to Directors to Authors: The "Stars" will Shine in NEPA March 22-24th

WAVERLY, PA (Jan. 28, 2019) – The Northeast Pennsylvania Film Festival, presented by the Waverly Community House and supported by the F. Lamot Belin Arts Foundation, today announced its official program selections for this year's festival, slated for March 22 through 24 in a variety of venues throughout downtown Scranton and the Waverly Community House.

Dedicated to nurturing emerging and independent filmmakers from Northeast Pennsylvania and around the world, the three-day festival correspondingly promotes cultural awareness and appreciation of film as an art form by exposing local audiences to unique and original cinema. Now in its third year, the Festival's growing reputation is built on a commitment to offer the region access to new and independently produced films by a wide range of emerging and established filmmakers.

The 2019 NEPA Film Festival will screen more than 50 films, including features, horror and animated shorts, documentaries, and international films along with an opening night gala, artist tributes, presentations and panel discussions, and the ever-popular Mystery Box Challenge.

Producer Robert May will be honored with the F. Lamot Belin Award for Excellence in Cinema at the festival's kickoff gala slated for Friday, March 22nd, 7 p.m., at the Waverly Community House.

May, originally from Dallas, PA, founded SenArt Films in 2000 with a focus on character-driven films. May has produced seven feature films to date which have collectively garnered over 40 awards including the Oscar®, BAFTA, Independent Spirit Award and Human Rights Award.

May's films include *The Station Agent*, directed by then first time director Tom McCarthy, which starred Peter Dinklage, Patricia Clarkson and Bobby Cannavale; *The Fog of War* (Errol Morris), *Stevie* (Steve James); *The War Tapes* (Deborah Scranton); and *Bonneville* (Chris Rowley). May's directorial debut, *Kids for Cash*, a film about greed, corruption and kids, earned the coveted *New York Times Critic's Pick* and went on to garner notable critic reviews. *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* call the film "Shocking, continually surprising," "Riveting! A real-life thriller

that rivals most dramatic fiction.” May’s latest project, *Lust for Gold: A Race Against Time* (currently in post-production), follows five men and a dog as they travel deep within Superstition Mountain, Arizona, in search of buried treasure.

During the opening night gala, an encore presentation of May’s *The Station Agent* will be screened. May will introduce the film and host a post-screening audience Q + A.

In addition to May’s award presentation, Waverly native and Abington Heights graduate Lisa Marie Stetler, the force behind the animated film *Ferdinand*, will receive the festival’s Vision Award during the festival’s opening-night festivities.

“I read the book and I immediately saw it as a movie,” Stetler says of the popular 1936 children’s classic ‘The Story of Ferdinand,’ by Munro Leaf. Not one to take no for an answer, Stetler pitched her idea to turn the beloved tale of a gentle bull who loved to smell the flowers into a movie to countless industry execs until 20th Century Fox and Blue Sky Studios signed on, releasing the animated film in 2017 with Stetler serving as producer.

Stetler’s vigilant crusade to bring Ferdinand’s anti-bullying message to the big screen has certainly paid off. Not only was it a global box office smash, it was nominated for a host of awards including Golden Globe and Academy Award nominations. “I knew I was supposed to do this,” Stetler says.

In addition to accepting the Vision Award at Friday’s gala, Stetler will also lead a panel brunch discussion Saturday morning at Posh Restaurant in downtown Scranton, *Pitch, Fund, Cast*, that will include Mountain Top filmmaker Chris Fetchko and New York City casting director Mia Cusumano.

Fetchko (director, writer and producer) is prepping for his fourth feature film project, *Blinded by Ed*, a dark romantic comedy, and a fifth feature film project, *Island People*, his first foray into the horror genre. Following up the indie festival darling, *All in Time*, which won numerous awards including Best Director at the Milan International Film Festival and will be screened Saturday, March 23rd at this year’s festival, Fetchko is excited to “get back on set” again.

Fetchko began his film career by co-writing and producing *Everything’s Jake*, starring Ernie Hudson, Debbie Allen, and Phyllis Diller. He then went on to produce *Eavesdrop* with Wendie Malick, Ted McGinley and Anna Chlumsky

Cusumano, formerly of Old Forge, recently worked on the 2018 comedy *Lez Bomb*, and the forthcoming Hulu series based on the stand-up comedy of Ramy Youssef, due out in March 2019.

Pitch, Fund, Cast will be held Saturday, March 23, 10:30 a.m., at Posh at the Scranton Club. \$25 advance ticket includes brunch.

Another major headliner of this year's festival lineup is author Charles Brandt, who will share insight on his biography being made into 2019's most anticipated film, *The Irishman*, by Martin Scorsese. Robert DeNiro, Al Pacino, Joe Pesci and Harvey Keitel are just some of the names involved in *The Irishman*, an adaptation of Brandt's acclaimed book, 'I Heard You Paint Houses.'

In the course of nearly five years of interviews, Frank Sheeran (played in the upcoming film by Robert De Niro) confessed to Brandt that he conducted more than 25 hits for the mob, including NEPA's own legendary don, Russell Bufalino (played by Joe Pesci) who, according to Sheeran, is said to have ordered the demise of Jimmy Hoffa.

Brandt's presentation, *When Scorsese Calls*, will be held in the private event space at the Bittenbender Building on Franklin Avenue on Saturday, March 23, at 3:30 p.m. Tickets are \$50 in advance and books will be available to purchase for Brandt to sign. Seating is limited for this event.

"When we had script meetings, it was Scorsese, De Niro, Steve Zaillian (scriptwriter), and me in the room. It was like winning the lottery," Brandt says. "I sat there with these men as part of a very important and historic project. It was awe-inspiring and humbling. They're such geniuses and I don't know their craft, but I know that the questions they asked me about the people involved showed a sensitivity and humanity that I was in awe of."

Of the hundreds submitted for consideration, the film receiving top billing at this year's festival is *The Pretender*, a documentary based on hometown hero Mike Kunda. For the past 40 years, the West Scranton native has dedicated his life to the Rocky film franchise and his fictional hero, Rocky Balboa.

The Pretender, an award-winning 2018 documentary, takes you inside Mike's life, revealing the origins of Mike's fascination with the Rocky character and how it continues to shape his life. The 50-minute film, which gets its NEPA premiere at this year's festival, tracks Kunda over a five-year period as he leaves his comfortable middle-class life behind to follow his dream of becoming a full-time Rocky Balboa impersonator.

"Mike's journey," says Detroit director Jim Toscano, "is an emotional trip through themes of obsession, passion and inspiration. In the end, he shows us that even the most seemingly unrealistic goals can offer the most rewarding and fulfilling life of all. The story isn't one so much about Rocky as it is about each of us discovering what truly drives and motivates us. I want people to see this film and truly be inspired to follow their own dreams, no matter how crazy or intimidating those dreams might be," Toscano says.

"We are honored and excited to share Mike's story with film fans in NEPA," says filmmaker and editor Danny Gianino. "His love for life and being true to oneself is an inspiration to us, and we hope it inspires the audience, as well."

Kunda and the filmmakers will introduce the film and answer audience questions after the prime time screening slated for Saturday, March 23rd, at 7 p.m. at the Ritz Theater in downtown Scranton.

Saturday's film schedule will wrap up with a 9 p.m. showing of *All in Time*, by Chris Fetchko. The film received 12 awards on the film festival circuit, including a Best Director nod for Fetchko and co-director Marina Donahue at the Milan International Film Festival.

Shot almost entirely in NEPA, the dramatic comedy follows main character Charlie as he leaves a secure job in New York City to manage his favorite band in his home region of Pennsylvania. Conflict arises when Charlie must learn to balance band tensions and his relationship with his girlfriend.

Fetchko, a West Hazelton native who loosely based the script on his own adventures as band manager of The Badlees, describes the film as "autobiographical but fictionalized" with "lots of twists and turns." Fetchko will introduce the film and host an audience Q + A after.

On Sunday, March 24rd, the PNC Auditorium in the Loyola Science Center at the University of Scranton will play host to all films and events. A panel discussion and The Mystery Box Challenge will round out the final day's events with a block of films by local filmmakers closing this year's 2019 NEPA Film Festival Sunday evening.

VIA Global Studios, the production arm of WVIA-TV, will offer a free panel discussion on *The Digital Age of Filmmaking 2.0*. Geared toward filmmakers and independent producers, the VIA team will share professional insights on the future of filmmaking at 2 p.m. at the PNC Auditorium.

Audience favorite, The Mystery Box Challenge, is also slated for Sunday afternoon. Back in September 2018, participating teams received a cardboard box filled with objects that had to be incorporated into a short film. Each Mystery Box contained an assortment of plot devices, ranging from character names, a line of dialogue, a prop, a type of location, a plot element or a wardrobe item. Filmmakers had three months to write a script, cast, shoot and edit their short films based on those items. The finished products will be revealed Sunday at 4 p.m. at the PNC Auditorium.

The NEPA Film Festival will conclude Sunday, March 24th, with a celebration and special screening of films by regional filmmakers including Lindsay Barrasse, Liz Naro, Jack Coleman, Ed Wasser and Luz Cabrales.

A limited number of All-Access Film Festival Passes are available for \$125 in advance and includes admission to the Opening Night Gala, the *Pitch, Fund, Cast Kickoff Brunch*, the Charles Brandt presentation *When Scorsese Calls*, as well as all films and other events. For more

information or to purchase All-Access passes, individual tickets or day passes, please visit nepafilmfestival.com.

The Northeast Pennsylvania Film Festival is proud to present the following films and calendar of events for the 2019 program:

Friday, March 22nd

Opening Night Gala, Awards Presentation, Filmmaker Reception and Encore Screening of *The Station Agent with Q + A* hosted by Producer Robert May

7 p.m. at the Waverly Community House

Tickets \$65 in advance/\$70 at the door

Events, Saturday, March 23rd

10:30 a.m. “Pitch, Fund, Cast” – Kickoff brunch and panel discussion featuring film producers Lisa Stetler and Chris Fetchko, and casting agent Mia Cusumano at Posh at the Scranton Club. Tickets \$25 in advance/\$35 at the door.

3:30 p.m. “When Scorsese Calls” - Author Charles Brandt will share insight on his stunning book, ‘I Heard You Paint Houses,’ being made into 2019’s most anticipated film, *The Irishman*, by Martin Scorsese at the private event space at the Bittenbender Building, \$50 in advance/\$60 at the door.

*Mr. Brandt will sign books sold at the event following his presentation. Limited seating.

Saturday, March 23rd, Film Schedule

All films showing at the Ritz Theater in Downtown Scranton. Tickets are \$10 in advance/\$12 at the door. All-Day Film Passes available for \$25.

11 a.m. A Bread Factory, Part I (Feature) Starring Tyne Daly, Elizabeth Henry and Janeane Garofalo. Director Patrick Wang brings of matrix of searching souls to life as a small-town theater struggles to survive in a two-part ode to the arts.

1:30 p.m. Mini-International Documentary Film Block:

Console My Heart (Ireland, Documentary, 14 mins) The story of Veronica, an opera singer from Cape Town and the difficulties she has suffered while seeking asylum in Ireland. A study about loss, bravery, love and singing.

Meerim (Kyrgyzstan, Documentary, 50 mins) The true story of Gulnara, “mother” to 142 children at an orphanage in Kyrgyzstan, and her ongoing fight against union officials who want to take her land. The film is the debut feature of Russian-born filmmaker Aleksandra Rechalova.

3 p.m. The Human Condition - A Curated Selection of Film Festival Shorts:

Angel (Ireland, Drama/Fantasy, 9 mins) A young girl wanders alone through Dublin's dark, bleak streets encountering adults in various states of despair.

Cycle (Drama, 14 mins) A single mother and recovering drug addict is given the chance to use heroin again, after being clean for 8 months.

Lavender (Australia, Drama, 10 mins) Lavender is the story of Poppy, a 17-year-old girl who, when confronted by her sister's sadness and the disappointing reality of finally kissing her first crush, learns to find empowerment in sisterhood.

Grandpa (Drama, 11 mins) A man wants to enjoy one final, perfect day before his memories fade away forever.

Truce (Drama, 13 mins) A soldier returns home from Vietnam only to find that the real battle has just begun.

Cliff (Spain, Drama, 15 mins) Lucia just moved to a new apartment in the suburbs of Madrid. While trying to start over, she receives a very particular visit.

5 p.m. Horror/Thriller/Science Fiction Block:

Love You to Pieces (Horror, 4 mins) A young woman assures her mate how much she loves him.

Road Less Traveled (Horror/Thriller, 10 mins) Directed by Dunmore native Lindsey Barrasse. Sometimes the monsters you left behind come back to haunt you.

Excursion (England, Thriller/Science Fiction, 1 hour, 24 mins) Tom wakes up in the middle of the night to his 20-year-old-self pointing a gun in his face, traveling through time from the 1980's USSR to see how socialism is prospering. Directed by Czech filmmaker Martin Grof.

7 p.m. NEPA Premiere of The Pretender

A documentary based on hometown hero Mike Kunda. For the past 40 years, the West Scranton native has dedicated his life to the Rocky film franchise and his fictional hero, Rocky Balboa. Mike Kunda and the filmmakers will introduce the film and answer audience questions after.

8:30 p.m. Animated Shorts Block:

Saturated (Family, 3 mins) A mother and daughter navigate the colors of the world they live in.

Move to Tiers (Fantasy/Music, 11 mins) Two wedding cake toppers come to life in a bakery and escape to find their own happily ever after.

Wild Woman (Drama, 3 mins, 30 secs) An animated poem to mankind, invoking current world issues including drone strikes and religious persecution.

Chicken Man Vs. Adolf Chickler & the ChickenNazis (8 mins) Say 'No' to fascism, kids!

Flip (Mystery, 4 mins) A cool and rebel skateboarder wanders the city. As night falls, he finds himself being stalked by a mysterious presence.

9 p.m. Scranton Premiere - All in Time

Shot almost entirely in NEPA, this dramatic comedy follows main character Charlie as he leaves a secure job in New York City to manage his favorite band in his hometown. The film received 12 awards on the film festival circuit, including a Best Director nod for Mountain Top's Chris Fetchko, who loosely based the script on his own adventures as band manager of The Badlees. Fetchko will introduce the film and offer an audience Q + A after.

Sunday, March 24th, Film and Events Schedule

All films and events to be held at The PNC Auditorium in the Loyola Science Center, University of Scranton Campus

10 a.m.

A Bread Factory, Part I, For the Sake of Gold (encore showing)

Starring Tyne Daly, Elizabeth Henry and Janeane Garofalo. After 40 years of running The Bread Factory, Dorothea and Greta are suddenly fighting for survival when a celebrity couple—performance artists from China—come to Checkford and build an enormous complex down the street, catapulting big changes in their small town.

Noon

A Bread Factory Part II, Walk with Me for a While

At The Bread Factory, they rehearse the Greek play, Hecuba. But the real theatrics are outside the theater where the town has been invaded by bizarre tourists and mysterious tech start-up workers. There is a new normal in Checkford, if it is even really Checkford any longer.

2 p.m.

The Digital Age of Filmmaking 2.0. VIA Global Studios, the production arm of WVIA-TV, will offer a free panel discussion. Geared toward filmmakers and independent producers, the VIA team will share its professional insights on the future of filmmaking.

4 p.m.

The Mystery Box Challenge: Back in September 2018, participating teams received a cardboard box filled with objects that had to be incorporated into a short film. Each Mystery Box contained an assortment of plot devices, ranging from character names, a line of dialogue, a prop, a type of location, a plot element or a wardrobe item. Filmmakers had three months to write a script, cast, shoot and edit their short films based on those items. The finished products will be revealed Sunday.

5:30 p.m. Local NEPA Filmmaker Block

Road Less Traveled (Encore Screening, Horror/Thriller, 10 mins) Directed by Dunmore native Lindsay Barrasse. Sometimes the monsters you left behind come back to haunt you.

Don't Quit: The Ross Cordaro Story (Documentary, 52 mins) Ross Cordaro, a gifted athlete and football player for the Dunmore Bucks, was injured in a freak wrestling accident that left him a quadriplegic. A story of inspiration and determination, this documentary film by the region's own Liz Naro and Jack Coleman depicts Ross's setback and triumphs through the decades since his 1974 injury.

Gun (Narrative Short, 29 mins) Two men struggling with their true identities are unknowingly brought together by a gun. Not accepting another for who they are can lead to a vicious cycle of hatred. Directed by Ed Wasser and filmed exclusively in NEPA.

Nick and Ophelia (Film Noir/Narrative Feature, 1 hour, 30 mins) A desperate man uses a ritual to bring the love of his life back from the dead only to find out the ritual has supernatural consequences. Directed by Luz Cabrales of Scranton Films.

###

ABOUT THE NORTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA FILM FESTIVAL

Established in 2016 by the Waverly Community House, The Northeast Pennsylvania Film Festival is supported by the F. Lamot Belin Arts Foundation and its mission to "build community through the arts." Dedicated to nurturing emerging and independent filmmakers from Northeast Pennsylvania and around the world, the three-day festival correspondingly promotes cultural awareness and appreciation of film as an art form by exposing local audiences to unique and original cinema. For more information or to purchase tickets for events scheduled March 22 through 24, 2019, visit nepafilmfestival.com. Also follow Northeastern Pennsylvania Film Festival on Facebook and Instagram.

ABOUT OUR SPONSORS

The third annual Northeast Pennsylvania Film Festival, a project of Scranton Tomorrow, is sponsored by The Lackawanna County Council of the Arts, WVIA Public Media, the People's Security Bank and Trust, and ATR Properties.