

Stacey Steers

ASHLAND DAILY TIDINGS

Ashland Independent Film Festival gears up for new season

By John Darling for the Tidings
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The Ashland Independent Film Festival is cranking up for its 17th season, preparing to show more than 100 films, branching out for the first time to a Medford theater and staging a new volunteer orientation Jan. 16 for some 350 locals who will handle chores from ticket sales to ushering, party crew, office and hospitality support and many other tasks that make the popular festival mesh.

The festival runs April 12-16 on screens in the Varsity Theater, Ashland Street Theaters and at Ashland Historic Armory. There will be two showings at a black box theater in Medford, which holds 90 people, across from Tinseltown, in response to “the people in the Collaborative Theater Project in Medford desiring to dip their toes in the (film festival) water,” says Emily McPeck, AIFF’s communications manager.

The number of film submissions keep going up every year. Local submissions jumped from 42 in 2017 to 69 for this season and local student offerings went from 32 last year to 60. General submissions grew from 774 to 783. Total submissions increased from 848 to 912.

Films are viewed by 17 volunteer screeners, who will pass the finalists to six programmers, then to AIFF Artistic and Executive Director Richard Herskowitz. Filmmakers will be notified if their film is in the festival on Feb. 2. The full line-up will be announced to the public March 20.

The free and public Festival Preview Night is at 7 p.m., March 20 in Southern Oregon University’s Music Recital Hall. It’s like a quick trailer of many major

films. On March 26 the box office opens to members, and on April 1 tickets will go on sale to the public.

The volunteer training is at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 16, at Scienceworks, 1500 E. Main St. It's open to anyone interested in participating in the many tasks of the festival, which sells tickets to an astounding 20,000 viewers.

"At the volunteer evening, we'll drink Noble coffee, have some cookies, give background information on AIFF and share general details on the volunteer experience," notes McPeck. "We'll also show a short film from last year's festival. This is purely an informational meeting, no commitment is required."

Volunteering, she said, "is a great way to meet filmmakers, to help arrange the talkback series and other tasks." Talkback sessions are free and open to the public on Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 10 a.m. at Ashland Springs Hotel during festival week.

This season's featured festival artist is Stacey Steers, who takes silent films and adds animation to them. She will have a digital exhibit at Schneider Museum of Art at SOU.