

# SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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### **Sonoma International Film Festival Announces Huge Response to Community Challenge Grant, Addition of New Board Members and a Sneak Peek at the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Festival**

SONOMA, CA (October 6, 2011) -- Sonoma International Film Festival, preparing for its landmark 15th anniversary in April, has bolstered its financial condition by quickly raising 85 percent of a \$100,000 matching challenge grant. The Sonoma Film Society, which produces the festival, has also strengthened its leadership by adding six new board members and selecting a new board chairman.

The new funding will be used to help the festival attract higher quality films for both its April festival and year-round cinema programming. It will allow the festival to increase its staff and, in particular, hire a marketing director to continue building membership in the film society and help the festival attract even more non-local visitors, who provide an economic boost to Sonoma hotels, guest houses, restaurants and other businesses.

The expanded support - both financial and leadership - comes as the festival plans for a five-day event April 11-15 that promises to be its best yet. It also positions the festival for a bright future after a decade and a half during which it has grown from modest beginnings into a unique cultural asset for the Sonoma Valley.

The festival's 15th anniversary follows a successful 2011 festival that drew an audience of more than 20,000 for 96 films from 14 countries, hosted 185 filmmakers and honored actress Susan Sarandon with a lifetime achievement award.

"We are thrilled with the support we have received from the community as we have begun raising money to meet our challenge grant," said Kevin McNeely, the festival's executive director. "We are fortunate that a member of the Sonoma community who believes in and truly supports the film festival has offered this \$100,000 anonymous gift. We are at \$85,000 in raising the match, and are confident that others in the community will step up and help us reach our goal.

"And with the new talent added to our dedicated board, we have depth and energy and astute guidance to lead us into the future."

The non-profit Film Society each year earmarks about \$25,000 from the festival's proceeds to support the Media Arts Program at Sonoma Valley High School. Funding from the festival is the program's primary source of support and has helped it grow from two computers available to a handful of students at its inception 10 years ago into a fully equipped media lab with 32 computers and more than a dozen state-of-the-art cameras. It has served hundreds of students and turned out graduates that have gone on to film school and professional careers at the likes of Pixar Animation Studio.

"The \$200,000 in combined funds from the anonymous donor and the matching grant will support continued improvements to the festival and help keep it on a sustainable financial course for decades to come," McNeely said. In turn, this will allow the film society to maintain or increase its commitment to the Media Arts Program and expand its support for film programs for middle school students at the Sonoma Valley Boys and Girls Club.

The 2012 festival will mark the 15-year landmark and, in keeping with the theme of this important anniversary, also pay tribute to the Latino community's contributions to Sonoma Valley's cultural heritage with a special La Quinceañera Film Festival. This "festival within a festival" will feature 15 remarkable Spanish language films and will be staged at the Boys and Girls Club. "Much like the La Quinceañera coming-of-age celebration for Latina girls on their 15th birthday, we feel this is an important and meaningful way for our festival to mark its coming of age in our diverse multi-ethnic community," said McNeely.

Claudia Mendoza-Carruth, who is programming the "La Quinceañera Film Festival," will bring a rich collection of Spanish language films to the festival. "In our search for films, I've attended Latino Film Festivals in Vancouver and Los Angeles and I'm so excited to bring the best of cinema 'en Español' to our festival! Our celebration is two-fold: for Latinos in the valley to see their culture, countries, language, and celebrities in film; and, for the thousands of film enthusiasts who attend the festival to appreciate the fabulous cinema coming out of Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, and other Spanish-speaking countries as well as from Latino directors and filmmakers from the U.S."

The addition of the Boys and Girls Club brings to eight the number of venues that will host films in 2012. The others are the Sebastiani Theatre, Sonoma Community Center, Sonoma Women's Center, Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, Sebastiani Winery, Vintage House and Murphy's Irish Pub. All but the Boys and Girls Club are within easy walking distance of Sonoma's Historic Plaza, which adds to the appeal for visitors. Transportation will be provided to and from the Boys and Girls Club from the Plaza.

The festival has already begun receiving submissions from independent and innovative filmmakers from around the world seeking to be included in the festival's diverse offerings of short, documentary and feature films. McNeely said the festival is also hoping to broaden its 2012 lineup of films made by women for women. In addition, film industry leaders will be invited to participate in two new panels -- a screenwriters "Script-to-Screen" panel and another panel on "How to Finance and Distribute Your Film."

Behind the scenes of it all is the work of the 14-member film society board, which provides direction, oversight and fund-raising support. That board now includes six new members: Adam Boucher, Diana Bugg, Roark Hoffman, Ted Judson (SF), Allen 'Skip' Olinger (SF), and Scott Ware (SF), who was recently elected to serve as chairman.

"I am honored to lead an incredibly distinguished board and help it guide and support the film festival at this exciting time," said Ware. "During my involvement with the festival this past spring, it didn't take long for me to see just how much of an asset it is to the Sonoma Valley. I am happy to be part of an organization that provides opportunity for young people and improves the quality of life in its community."

In preparation for the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary and in recognition of the festival's enduring presence in the community, McNeely acknowledges the talent and commitment of the Board, both past and present. "The evolution of our festival is the result of the cumulative labor of love that our board members and other volunteers have put into it over these first 15 years," said McNeely. "We owe a great debt to all who have served in the past, to those who continue to serve and now to these talented and generous individuals who have agreed to help lead us into the future."

The new members bring a diverse set of skills and background to the festival board:

- **Adam Boucher** is CEO of Adam Capital, Inc., of Sonoma, which provides investment opportunities in clean energy and other environmentally-conscious business ventures. A San Francisco native, he attended the University of California, San Diego and while a student was appointed executive

chairman of the California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG). He later became a creative director at Determined Productions, pioneering cause-related marketing campaigns including the World Wildlife Fund and Rain Forest Action Network.

- **Diana Bugg** is the Corporate Account Executive at Hewlett Packard for Wells Fargo Bank. She has an executive sales career of more than 30 years, including 10 years at IBM and five at KPMG Consulting Services. She lives in San Francisco, but she and her husband Jim will be spending more time at their Sonoma residence. Her corporate contacts and strategic marketing skills will be valuable in the sponsorship/development area and help expand the festival's reach to potential San Francisco film society members. She has been a loyal festival supporter since its inception and has attended many of them over the 15 years.
- **Ted Judson** is a marketing/brand development executive at Electronic Arts, one of the world's largest publishers of video games. He joined Electronic Arts after working in advertising at Ogilvy and Mather in New York and Ketchum Advertising in San Francisco, producing television programming for ESPN and managing consumer software brands for Software Publishing Corporation. He has been a festival patron for several years. He and his family live in San Francisco.
- **Roark Hoffman** is manager of the First Republic Bank branch in Napa. He left an engineering career at Chrysler Motors to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities in California, becoming president and eventual owner of an Internet service provider. He sold the business in 2005 and began a new career in finance, becoming a manager at San Francisco-based First Republic, one of the nation's leading private banks.
- **Allen 'Skip' Olinger** is an investment manager for individual, trust and foundation portfolios and is the president of the Geraldine and Emory Ford Foundation, which funds projects in secondary education and the arts. He has served in senior management roles in numerous companies, including vice president for finance at Interpool, Inc., and president and CEO at both PCR Corporation and MicroTech Leasing Corporation. He lives in San Francisco.
- **Scott Ware** is a communications and special projects consultant who moved to Sonoma from the Seattle area after a long career in the newspaper business. He was the editor of daily newspapers in Puerto Rico, New Mexico and Washington State and has since worked for clients including local governments, a regional library system, a Puget Sound utility and a variety of non-profits and businesses. He served as a media consultant to the 2011 film festival and now lives in San Francisco with his wife and two children.

The new board members join McNeely and seven others who remain on the board: Alex Archbold, Nancy Bundschu, Leslie Carlson, Beth Fox, Kimberly Hughes, Jesse Levine and Lee Jay Olness, as well as board treasurer, Bill Jasper.

For the past two years, McNeely has served as both executive director and board chairman. But he encouraged the board to select a new chairman to improve oversight and accountability and so he could concentrate his energies on the duties of executive director as the festival grows.

### **About the Sonoma International Film Festival**

The Sonoma International Film Festival is one of the top destination film festivals in the world and, located in the heart of Wine Country, is uniquely positioned to be a lively celebration of film, food and

wine. An annual gathering for film industry insiders, cinema enthusiasts, filmmakers and critics, SIFF is considered among the most scenic and epicurean places to experience the art of film. Founded in 1997, The Sonoma International Film Festival is a five-day international event that takes pride in showcasing emerging talent, providing a supportive environment for filmmakers and creating a rich cultural asset for the local community.

SIFF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Festival supports the Sonoma Valley High School Media Arts Program established over a decade ago by the Sonoma Film Society. For information about the 2012 Festival (April 11-15), please contact SIFF:

Phone (707) 933-2600

[www.sonomafilmfest.org](http://www.sonomafilmfest.org)

<http://www.facebook.com/sonomafilmfestival>

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