

More relevant than ever: One Earth Film Festival

From Oak Park roots, annual festival now covers five counties

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In October, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report warning of the effects associated with climate change. Ana Garcia Doyle, executive director and one of the founding members of the One Earth Film Festival notes that for many, the report which predicted crisis effects as early as the year 2040 was scary. “It is very depressing to see a possible year given in the report that is within our lifetime and within our children’s lifetimes.” While understanding the impulse to despair and “crawl under a bed,” Garcia Doyle urges people to do just the opposite, “Do something. Move forward.” She has just the opportunity for you to do so.

In 2012 as a board member of Green Community Connections, Garcia Doyle was part of a team looking to get the message out about environmental issues. In February of that year, they decided to put on a film festival to coincide with Earth Day that April. Never mind that they had only seven weeks to do so and no experience with film.

They turned to film as a medium when they were trying to think about how to spread the message beyond those in the community who were already interested in environmental issues. Garcia Doyle says that using movies to tell stories resonates with people. “It’s more exciting than data. Things that can get you at an emotional level can be persuasive.”

Garcia Doyle admits, “It was kind of an ambitious idea because we’re environmentalists and know nothing about film. We hoped to get a few dozen people to attend. Our expectations were pretty modulated.”

When roughly 500 people attended that first festival, they knew they were on to something. “There was a demand. We thought we were drumming up something, but really, it was already there.”

Eight years later, the film festival has grown immeasurably. This year, over 5,400 people attended the March screenings and events, and two summer screenings, including one at Millennium Park, drew an additional 10,000 attendees. In 2018, the festival included 35 films, 62 screenings and events in 51 venues across five counties.

Garcia Doyle says a group of 90 film reviewers sees over 600 hours of footage in



order to narrow down the list of films for screenings. “With our 90 viewers, we simulate an audience. Everyone has a different view point, and we make sure we have representation of our 14 topic areas.”

By the end of November, the group has a final slate of films and is working to fit them into appropriate time slots in the communities holding the screenings. That fit is an important part of the mission of the festival according to Garcia Doyle. “The festival is not an entertainment festival even though the films can be entertaining and thought-provoking and paralyzing. We want to incite action. One of the reasons we work in so many communities is that the environmental change effort has to work on the local level.”

She points to screenings last year in Chicago’s Kenwood neighborhood which tied into urban gardening projects taking place in four community churches. After screenings of an urban agriculture film, members of area urban gardens shared

their experiences and community members were available to offer ways for locals to volunteer and get involved. Garcia Doyle says tie-ins like these help fire up residents and make it easier for them to get involved when the cause is tangible and part of their community.

Similarly, at the Shedd Aquarium last year, a movie on the effect of plastics in the oceans was screened. Afterwards, the

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Ana Garcia Doyle



Photos and poster provided by One Earth Film Festival

Winners of the Young Filmmakers Contest 2018.

aquarium had scientists speak on the effect of plastics on the world’s coral reefs and launched its Shedd the Straw Campaign. As part of this campaign, local establishments, including the Chicago White Sox and Guaranteed Rate Field banned the use of plastic straws.

Garcia Doyle says efforts such as these reflect the import of the festival. “If we can help people launch things, we can make really substantive movement and change.”

As the One Earth Film Festival looks forward to coming back in 2019 from March 1 through March 10, Garcia Doyle says the time is right for people to not only attend

but also to get involved. “Since the election, we’ve seen a huge bump in volunteers and partner agencies. People don’t want to feel powerless. They want to do something.”

With more than 400 volunteers, there is always room for more at the One Earth Film Festival. Garcia Doyle hopes the news from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will galvanize more people to join in the efforts.

“You can work with us. We always need more people. It’s a great way to affect change and you can meet others concerned about environmental issues.”

'Adults screwed up the environment': Young filmmakers contest lets youth offer solutions

One year after the founding of the One Earth Film Festival, its founders launched the Young Filmmakers contest in 2013. Ana Garcia Doyle, the festival's executive director, says the young filmmakers component gives a voice to the next generation. "Really, this is a response to the fact that this is their world. We've screwed it up and they're going to have to pick up the pieces. There's a lot of agitation, but it's not entirely negative. What is this new world we're in? Embedded in that is a lot of creativity."

Lisa Files, co-director of the youth effort alongside Sue Crothers Gee, says that while the YFC was garnering 10 to 25 submissions a year, last year that number jumped to 115. She credits the spike to a few factors. "We doubled the prize money; a former winner created a great, promotional video for us; we renamed the college-level prize a 'scholarship,' and listed it on national scholarship databases; and we posted the contest on Film Freeway, a national platform for film



Photos and poster provided by One Earth Film Festival

Young Filmmakers event with virtual reality viewing at One Earth Film Festival.

festival submissions."

The contest is open to kids from third grade to college-age, with different divisions and prizes by age group. Filmmakers in grades 3 to 5 compete to win \$100 and a matching \$100 gift to the charity of their choice that supports the theme of their film. Those in grades 6 to 8, receive \$200 in prize money and make a \$200 gift;

those in grades 9 through 11 win \$350 and a matching gift of \$350, and grade 12 through college win \$1,000 and a \$1,000 matching gift.

Garcia Doyle notes that tying in the matching gift really brings home the impact of their work for the winners. "At the award ceremony, we invite the non-profits the winners choose, and the kids can give

the check to them."

For the competition, kids are tasked with creating a three to eight-minute film on one of six sustainability topics: energy, food, transportation, waste, water or open space/ecosystems. They present both their topic and a proposed solution. This year, the YFC is holding a filmmaking workshops for kids through the River Forest Park District. Students in grades 6 to 8 meet Sunday, Dec. 2 from 1 to 4:30 p.m. Students in grades 3 through 5 meet on Sunday, Dec. 9 from 1 to 4:30 p.m. Workshops are led by film writer, editor, director and teacher Jonathan Moeller. The cost is \$30 for residents and \$35 for non-residents; registration is at www.rfparks.com

Interest in the contest has been significant from the Oak Park and River Forest area, and Garcia Doyle says the reach is growing, with many submissions from Chicago Public Schools as well as young people outside of the Chicago area.

She says it is important to get the next generation involved in environmental causes. "They might not solve climate change right now, but they have great ideas. This contest lets them lift up their voices. It's their world, and they're going to be living with it."

Lacey Sikora



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