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Tupelo Film Festival reels in successful run

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By Michaela Gibson Morris

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Tupelo may not have that Hollywood glitz, but filmmakers here for the Tupelo Film Festival said the town knows how to roll out the red carpet.

Cleveland, Ohio director Bob Gray, who describes his film "Big Foot" as a horr-eddy, couldn't be more pleased with how Tupelo audience responded to his work

"They had a blast from beginning to end," Gray said. "It was a full balcony."

The third annual film festival drew filmmakers from as far away as New York and California, and the early reviews are glowing, said Festival director Pat Rasberry. The festival had 34 films and directors, producers and writers connected to 19 of the projects attended the festival and workshops.

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"The filmmakers have been very complementary of Tupelo and its hospitality," Rasberry said.

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About 550 people attended the screenings, workshops and panel discussions over the course of the weekend, she said.

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"I didn't know what to expect," Joe Cultrera, whose film "Hand of God" won for best feature documentary. "I've been surprised. I've had nothing but positive responses."

In addition to making independent film accessible to the community, the festival aims to help independent filmmakers connect with each other and experts in the field.

PHOTO GALLERIES



"The filmmakers were excited about talking to true Hollywood professionals," said Peggy Webb, a member of the festival committee who helped organize workshops with Kathie Fong Yoneda, a independent script consultant, and Jeff Young, a Los Angeles Film School instructor and former film studio executive.

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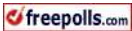
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Strong showing

Northeast Mississippians were well represented when the awards were handed out Saturday night.

Films by Matthew Graves of Oxford and Rex Harsin of Tupelo took first and second place respectively in the comedy category.

Tony Caldwell of Tupelo received best experimental film for "Apparitions Unrenowned," which was produced by his wife.

"For a starting festival, it was a strong field," said festival judge Arthur Jafa Fielder, a Tupelo native and cinematographer who worked on Julie Dash's "Daughters of the Dust" and Spike Lee's "Crooklyn."

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