

Expanded Greater Phoenix Jewish Film Festival is a Cultural Showcase

By Judy Hippner

“Tradition!” Tevya the milkman sang its praises in the iconic film “Fiddler on the Roof.” Since cinema was invented, the Jewish people have looked to the screen to showcase their traditional culture, with all its pathos, drama, tragedy, humor and history. This is the mission of the Greater Phoenix Jewish Film Festival, which over the past year has merged and expanded to a cultural tour de force that expects an audience of 6,000 moviegoers.

After a year of courtship negotiations, the thirteen-year-old Phoenix Jewish Film Festival and the five-year-old East Valley Jewish Film Festival have officially merged, making the conglomerate a powerhouse in area film festival entertainment. Says Assistant Executive Director Adrian Bendick, “The major difference between this year and last is that through publicity, we will be able to expand into more communities by merging funds, we will have the affordability to get newer, first-rate films, and be able to present a more focused cinematic event to attract moviegoers throughout the Valley.”

The winner in this merger is the public. A total of ten films will be shown at two geographically spaced venues -- Harkins Chandler Crossroads off Route 202 and the Harkins Camelview 5 in Scottsdale -- to attract ticket holders from Phoenix, Scottsdale, Cave Creek, Paradise Valley, Glendale, Peoria, Gilbert, Mesa, Tempe, Ahwatukee, Chandler, Sun Lakes, and Queen Creek. The area is home to approximately seventeen Jewish congregations and organizations, which the GPJFF is counting on for support. Publicity will come mainly through email and hard mail based on an address list of almost 10,000 names.

The merger was a bold step for GPJFF, which is now one of the only film festivals of its kind in the entire country that is completely independent. Success rides on its core of volunteers and community support. To bring in funding, under its nonprofit status, the GPJFF will publish an ad and supporter journal, to be distributed at the screenings. Also, the organizers continue to remain dependent on individual donations from patrons as well as film sponsors. Hospice of the Valley has been designated as the guest charity for the 2010 Festival.

It is still more than three months before the Festival opens on February 20, but preparations have been going on for nearly a year. The two film selection committees have met once a week since last March as they focus on a variety of dramas, documentaries, shorts, features, comedies and Holocaust genres. “The committee’s goal is to bring the best there is to thousands of moviegoers, who will be our ultimate critics,” says Executive Director Jerry Mittelman.

For further information, please go to www.gpjff.org.