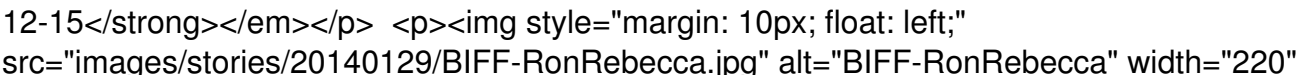


**The 8th Annual Beaufort International Film Festival Returns February 12-15**



By Mark Shaffer

For most of a decade now Ron and Rebecca Tucker have done something a lot of people around here would consider nuts. Each February, in the absolute dead of winter, in the lowest slump of the off-season in the Lowcountry, they put on a film festival. Crazy still, they expect people to show up for it, buy tickets, book hotel rooms and spend their money in the local shops, restaurants and bars. And here's the really crazy part: it's worked. Hell, it's boomed.

Since its inception the Beaufort International Film Festival ♦ BIFF to locals ♦ has grown, well, like mad. With each edition total audience numbers have risen like a full moon tide. Entries continue to pour in from all over the globe. And industry insider word-of-mouth spreads the news about this funky little fest in the land of Forrest Gump. In November that last bit paid off as MovieMaker Magazine and MovieMaker.com readers picked BIFF as one of the "25 Coolest Film Festivals In The World" right along with Tribeca and Manhattan. (Charleston also made the list.) But perhaps the most important validation comes in the numbers revealed in a survey conducted during last year's festival.

Mark Shaffer: The Chamber of Commerce study finally backed up what you long held to be fact.

Ron: The majority of the people who attended the festival were here in Beaufort because of the festival.

Rebecca: And most importantly they were from out of town.

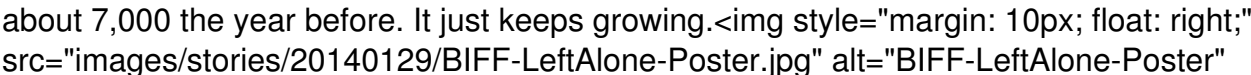
Ron: They represented the "heads in beds" numbers the Chamber hoped to get.

MS: Essentially that proves what you've been saying all along, that the festival is a destination event with a viable economic impact on the community in a seasonal slack time.

Ron: I think so. Hotels and inns were pretty much booked and there were a lot people walking around downtown wearing BIFF caps and t-shirts.

MS: We heard lots of good feedback from restaurants and bars. And the numbers were up once again.

Ron: We were just shy of 8,000 people, up from about 7,000 the year before. It just keeps growing.



We've got a new website this year (beaufortfilmfestival.com). The trailers are there. The film synopses are there. We've really been talking up the Screenwriter's Workshop and I think a lot of people are a little surprised that we devote as much time as we do to the screenwriters.

MS: BIFF's a rarity ♦ one of the few festivals to devote an entire evening to screenwriters.

Ron: One of the interesting stories this year is the Feature finalist, "The One Who Loves You." Beaty Reynolds wrote the screenplay and he's asked to take part in the workshop. They actually shot most of it back in 2009, but didn't get it finished and released until last year. He says that if they wanted to get the film made, they had to do it themselves. It's a true independent film. It reminds me of the reason Gary Weeks won the first year with "29 Reasons To Run." It really was independent film, where you hired all your buddies and rented all of the equipment. One of the primary actors in a scene was the Boom Operator.

MS: This gets back to what makes this festival so great and so unique: everything happens under one roof at the USCB Center for the Arts. Everyone mingles and mixes. Writers, directors, producers, actors, animators, composers are all interacting with the public and each other.

Ron: Exactly. And we have a lot of multi-talented people who wear a lot of hats. In 2011 Seth Boggess' short film, "Left Alone," blew the audience away. Not only did he write, direct, edit, and co-produce it, he did the music, too!

I think we've raised the bar on the talent level each year and gotten more critical of

the films we select.

MS: By the way, the photo on his IMDB page is a shot of Seth holding his "Best Short Film" trophy in front of the BIFF backdrop.

Ron: Nice.

MS: Seems like each year

there's a film that really strikes a chord with the audience. "Awaken the Dragon" from a couple years back springs to mind. Dragon Boat Beaufort was organized as a result ♦ practically before the credits were through rolling. Anything similar this year?

Ron: We have a film that deals with Alzheimer's that's made such an impact on our local group (Alzheimer's Family Services of Greater Beaufort) that they wanted to give a special award to the director, Barbara Klutinis. She's been personally affected by the disease - her husband's been diagnosed with Alzheimer's which inspired her to do the film.

MS: One of the most impressive categories in recent years has been Student Film. The University of North Carolina School for the Arts has been a force to be reckoned with. This year they have every single film in that category plus a few more.

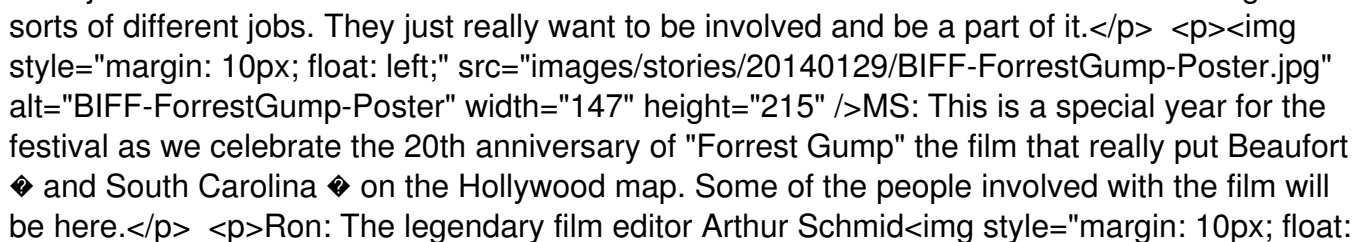
Ron: They have a very serious film department and every aspect of these films is produced in-house and they do a fantastic job. Kate Miller is the Festival Coordinator and one of her jobs is to get these films to out there. That's part of their recruiting process. They send us the best of the best. A lot of what we get are Masters level films and when they're finished they go to work in the business.

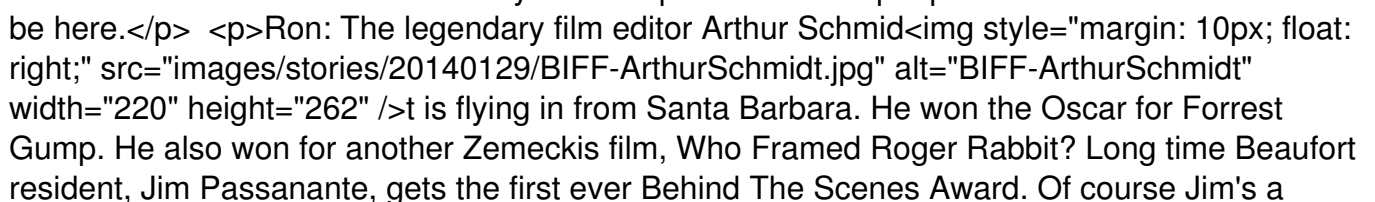
(See the accompanying interview with Kate Miller)

MS: The unsung heroes of this entire operation are your volunteers. Without them, there is no festival.

Ron: Our volunteer base is really strong. In fact there's a bunch of them working in the room next door.

Rebecca: I'd say we have just over 100. Most of them work several shifts over the course of the festival doing all sorts of different jobs. They just really want to be involved and be a part of it.

MS: This is a special year for the festival as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of "Forrest Gump" the film that really put Beaufort ♦ and South Carolina ♦ on the Hollywood map. Some of the people involved with the film will be here.

Ron: The legendary film editor Arthur Schmid  is flying in from Santa Barbara. He won the Oscar for Forrest Gump. He also won for another Zemeckis film, Who Framed Roger Rabbit? Long time Beaufort resident, Jim Passanante, gets the first ever Behind The Scenes Award. Of course Jim's a legend in the business. He's built sets for huge films.

MS: And appropriately Forrest Gump was the film that brought him here.

Ron: Right. Gump brought him here and he never left. And that's part of the reason we did the "Behind The Scenes Award" this year.

People like Jim don't get enough recognition.

And we've got a few more returnees.

Mary Morgan was the location manager for Gump and went on to become the director of the state film office. Bill Roberson is scheduled to appear. He's credited as "Fat Man on Bench." Deborah McTeer was the "Woman With Child on Bench." She's coming. David Brown who ran the boats for the river scenes will be there as will Teresa Denton who played Lt. Dan's fianc ♦, plus a few more including Paul Dengler the official Forrest Gump for the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company.

MS: I'm just guessing there may be an emphasis on shrimp at the opening gala.  
There's a special screening of the film on that Friday followed by a panel discussion with most of those people you just mentioned. I'm honored to moderate that.

Ron: If it's anything like last year's Radio panel, it should be fun.

MS: With the kind of growth

BIFF's experienced over the years, what's in store two or three years down the road?

Ron: Right now we're basically a three day festival all under one roof at USCB. I could see expanding to five days with more things to do, more workshops, more film-oriented activities. And maybe moving some of those things to smaller venues or even going out on location for demonstrations, classes and the like. We're still pretty comfortable with the numbers we can seat at USCB.

As word continues to get out that this is a great festival to attend and be a part of, then more people will want to come. It's a destination for a lot of folks and every year I worry until I see them in the seats. Every year.

**IF YOU'RE GOING**

Opening reception is February 12th on the rooftop of Old Bay Marketplace. Screenings take place at the USCB Center for the Arts Thursday, the 13th through Saturday the 15th with the awards ceremony that evening followed by the after party at Saltus River Grill.

Buy your tickets online at [www.beaufortfilmfestival.com](http://www.beaufortfilmfestival.com) . Tickets are also available at the Beaufort Film Society office at 708 Carteret St. and the Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center in the Arsenal at 701 Craven St. in historic Downtown Beaufort.