

Women in Film and Video of Maryland

www.wifvmd.org ~ 410-685-FILM

February/March 2009

Letter from the President



Dear Members:

At WIFV-MD, our first priority always has been and continues to be, our members. I want each of you to know how much I personally, and on behalf of WIFV-MD, appreciate your membership. However, this year we want to expand on your membership, but we cannot do that without your service. We need you to volunteer to assist us this year in many areas. We are asking our members to come forward and share your skills. If you are talented in fundraising, event management, bookkeeping, clerical, training, customer service, mentoring, photography, cinematography or production we are looking for you!

This year we want to hit the ground running with our efforts to raise funds to do our events. If you are interested in being apart of our volunteer team, please let us know. This is your chance to pay it forward for all your success. We want this to be a year of service and growth for Women in Film and Video of Maryland. So here's your chance to step up and get involved. Come out to every networking meeting and take advantage of your membership.

To learn more about steps you can take in general to be apart of the programs at WIFV-MD, look at the website. Some of you have been doing exciting things and we need to hear about them so that we can celebrate with you. WIFV-MD wants to promote you. If you are a success, we are a success. I encourage you to access the information we are providing on this website. We remain committed to providing our members a great service through networking, our listserv, training, and other events. But, in these tough times, we must pull together and roll up our sleeves to help each other to get ahead in this industry. Many have worked diligently with some great people in this industry such as; Pat Moran, Rita O'Brennan, Rosemarie Levy, John Waters, Steve Yeager, Richard Chisholm, Jack Gerbes and many others. The WIFV family is strong, but we do need to work together to enhance our services. To that end, WIFV has been reaching out to you, its members, to share in the great experiences that we have by doing some things with us at industry events. I guarantee you will find it rewarding and also beneficial for your experience or a lift in your heart of knowing you did something rewarding.

Once again, we sincerely encourage you to come forward and help in anyway you can. Now is the time. Don't keep telling yourself that you don't have enough time. Make time, and you will find that you have done a good thing. I look forward to seeing you as we embark on our next event!

Respectfully,

Arlette Thomas-Fletcher
WIFV-MD, President

REFLECTIONS OF PAST NETWORKING MEETINGS

February Meeting Wrap-up

The January member meeting of WIFV-MD, graciously hosted by **Renegade Studios**, brought us up to date on the state of the film industry in Maryland. Our knowledgeable speakers included the Head of the **Maryland Film Office, Jack Gerbes**, and Board Member of **MD Film Coalition, Rosemarie Levy**. Despite the downturn in projects being film in Maryland over the past few years, Gerbes confirmed that there is still some room for optimism, with video projects like **“Reincarnation”** and **“The Washingtonian”** looking promising. Additionally, Gerbes mentioned that Coppin State has just introduced a new BA of Entertainment Management-which shows a bolstering of support for the entertainment industries in Maryland.

Despite the optimism, Maryland, nevertheless, is having a problem keeping its film industry workers employed *in Maryland*. Gerbes stated Maryland is developing a problem of attrition because it is not competitive on the incentives offered to film production companies. For several years, Maryland had numerous projects filming in the state – giving local crew members the opportunity to hone their skills. As costs became tighter and Maryland crews became more skilled, producers were more inclined to hire local crew, providing more jobs and opportunities for Maryland to develop even more highly skilled workers for the film industry. However, in the most recent years projects have been going elsewhere because of other states’ incentives (mostly tax related). As the productions go to other states, our workers are left unemployed and in many cases forced to move to where the work is. Either way, the state loses revenue.

Maryland used to be in the top ten for film production, but our ranking has dropped to some where around 20th. The obvious question being asked: “where have all the movies gone?” In recent years, states like Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Michigan, and Connecticut have been offering increasing tax incentives in the forms of credits and rebates to production companies that film in their states. In the extreme is Michigan, which currently offers 40% refundable tax credit with no cap except on salaries. (A summary of film production incentives in North America can be found at www.afci.org/incentives/north_america.htm.) Maryland simply has not kept pace with the other states’ incentives. To illustrate the impact of incentives, consider the movie “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button”. This film was originally written to be filmed in Maryland, but since Louisiana offered a better financial incentive package, the script was re-written and the movie ultimately filmed in Louisiana.

The Maryland Film Office is doing its best to facilitate film production in Maryland and Gerbes discussed two specific initiatives the film office is undertaking to keep the entertainment industry strong in Maryland. First the film office had a meeting in November 2008 with other non-traditional entertainment companies in Maryland. These included companies in the gaming industry, music recording industry, as well as educational institutions. The aim was to set up an advisory panel to see how the interests of these industries and their ancillary services could be combined and integrated with those of the film and video industries in the state. The second initiative involved the redirecting of funds to support local film festivals, with a three goals in mind: to help grow the film industry organically within the state; to increase cultural tourism; and to highlight the impact of the industry on the state. Applications for film festival support have closed for the 2009 fiscal year, but applications for the next fiscal year will begin being accepted in July 2009.

2008-2010 WIFV MD Board Members

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February Meeting Wrap-up (continued)

However, as Rosemarie Levy pointed out, incentives are the only way to bring out-of-state producers back to Maryland. Her organization, The MD Film Industry Coalition is working to convince legislators that supporting the film industry in Maryland is not only a good idea, but a fiscally responsible idea as well. Working with an experience lobbyist, the organization is supporting an overhaul of Maryland film legislation. Currently, Maryland offers a 25% rebate of taxes paid by film producers, but the rebate amount is capped at \$4 million annually. This means that one big budget film can easily eat up the entire incentive program, and thereby leave our workers unemployed for the rest of the year as productions go to states with no caps. The newly proposed legislation, in brief, provides for a 28% rebate of taxes paid in the state by film producers who have expended at least \$500,000 in state and whose film is intended for nationwide commercial distribution – with no cap. The aim of course is to get the producers to come to Maryland and spend their money in the first place

Levy stressed that even in these tough times the legislation was fiscally responsible to the citizens of Maryland. There are two obvious benefits: first, because the incentive is offered as a rebate, the state would actually be making money even though it pays the rebate. The producers must spend meaningful amounts of money in the state before they become eligible for the rebate. In addition, it should be also considered that film crews spend lots of money locally wherever they go thereby supporting local Maryland small businesses. Economists seem to agree: a widely supported New Mexico study concluded that for every dollar a state spent on rebates, it earned \$1.50. Even by conservative estimates that is a good investment. Secondly, these film projects are “shovel ready.” They don’t require a lot of administrative planning and development by bureaucrats. The infrastructure is already in place so film projects begin producing revenue for the state from day one.

What needs to happen now, according to Levy, is that the legislators need to be educated about what the film industry contributes to the everyday lives of Marylanders. She explained that it was really helpful for the legislators to take a “field trip” to a set and see first hand the “Marylanders” involved and the benefits they received from the film industry: from jobs (and equally important health insurance) for crew members and actors, to support of local businesses, and cultural enrichment for all. Levy encouraged everyone, whether directly connected to the industry, or only peripherally affected by it, to write to their legislators in support of MD Senate Bill 596/MD House Bill 908. For more information on how to do that she referred all to the MD Film Industry Coalition’s website (www.mdfilm.org)



Also at the meeting in February, members were introduced to the ACN network of video phones. **Member Joann Sherrer** and her Regional Vice President, Leanne Gabriel, demonstrated the ACN video phone and explained how it is the next wave in telecommunications, an effect tool now for interviewing in business and auditioning situations, and a wonderful medium for sharing sound and images with loved ones and family. Gabriel and Sherrer also told about opportunities to become independent distributors for CAN, and the benefits of flexibility and extra income in the form of residuals that ACN offered distributors. For more information about the phone or becoming a distributor, go to www.pinnacle.acnrep.com.

March Member Meeting Wrap-up

WIFV-MD's March member meeting was hosted by **Gregg Landry and Blue Rock Productions** (www.bluerockproductions.com) at their studio in Northwest Baltimore. Blue Rock Productions Studios will be holding an **open house** (to show off the studio upgrades) and **small trade fair** featuring both software and video technology vendors. The date is **April 24, 11:00- 6:00**. For more information contact Blue Rock Productions.

Our member meeting was an information packed evening with **Adele Schmidt and Jehan Harney**.

“[Schmidt] is an accomplished film maker. Her films include: **The Power of Forgiveness**, *Cathedral Today*, the docudrama *Albert Schweitzer - Called to Africa*, and **Bonhoeffer**, all of which aired nationally on PBS. Her award winning films **Land of Mennonites** and **Juana's Journey** participated in more than 20 film festivals around the world. [Schmidt is also] the owner of the production company *Zeitgeist Media*, where she is developing **The PROG Project**, a documentary feature about progressive music; and **Toledo**, a visual essay about Mexican painter Francisco Toledo.”

In addition to making her own films (list films), Schmidt, together with partners **Sam Hampton**, Director of Planning and Special Projects and **Erica Ginsberg**, Executive Director, run Docs in Progress (www.docsinprogress.org), a non-profit organization which offers courses for documentary makers, as well as individual consultations for documentary makers needing help at any stage of their project. Hampton is the fund raising genius; Schmidt works with craft of film making; and Ginsberg works directly with outreach and distribution issues. Together the trio can answer and assist most documentary film makers at any and all stages of their film making process.

Discussions at the meeting hit on all aspects of documentary film making. For example, when it comes to funding, Schmidt stressed that it is important to have the right proposal for the right audience. First one must understand the difference between a proposal and a treatment. The former tells how the story will be told; the latter tells the story in brief. A proposal is like a business plan that you will submit to potential investors. Like any other business plan, the proposal should describe the process; the team involved; and contains supplemental information, like a budget and other necessary information for the investors to understand what the project is and why they should fund it.

Schmidt also stressed that it is important not only to go after prestigious cross-genre funders like ITVS, but it is also important to identify your target audience and go after those people/foundations for support. It seems obvious, but it is so often overlooked: if you are making a film that touches on health issues you should be broadly looking for support from those with an interest in health care – foundations, doctors, hospitals, insurance companies, etc. On the other hand, if you are looking to fund a film dealing with NASCAR, you wouldn't go after those healthcare sponsors at all, but should look to car and racing enthusiast organizations. There will still be competition for funding, but it will be much less. Schmidt also stated that it wasn't enough to just go after a handful of funding sources; if you really want funding you should be pursuing 50 or more foundations or other sources of funding.

When it comes to craft in documentaries, the example of “drama” was discussed. Schmidt explained that while most documentaries are just that -a documentation of something - it is important to find what makes that “something” interesting. Finding an interesting character who the audience is attracted to, and editing the story to create some dramatic tension are critical to making documentaries that will appeal to a more commercial audience. When asked how she chooses her subjects for her films, Schmidt said it was really personal, but generally she chooses subject that she is intrigued by and wants to explore. Her film then becomes her own journey of discovery, a quality that is reflected in the unfolding of her film.

Once a film is made (or nearly so), the point is to have it seen. Docs in Progress helps with that, too. For filmmakers who need help finishing the editing or getting feedback on their story, Doc in Progress has an unfinished film night every other month, in which audiences are encouraged to comment on strengths and weaknesses of the unfinished films they have just viewed. This provides the filmmaker constructive criticism to help them focus and finish their films. In addition, once a film is finished, Docs in Progress can help the filmmaker identify out reach possibilities, including but not limited to festivals, where the film can be shown and publicized.

Despite encouraging documentary filmmakers to seek funds from sources other than the obvious, highly competitive big funders, Schmidt introduced the group to filmmaker **Jehan Harney**, a client of Docs in Progress who had recently been awarded funding from ITVS. Harney's current film in progress is entitled *Close To My Heart* (due out toward the end of the year) and tells about the plight of some Iraqi refugee/immigrants once they arrive in the US. Harney spoke about the ITVS application process and offered the following advice that she had received from an ITVS judge when her first proposal was rejected. When applying for ITVS funding, state in your premise, in one sentence, what your story is about and why it is unique...then talk about the story. The story should have both micro and macro appeal- it should appeal to a discrete audience, but also show how the story is relevant to the US, as a nation. ITVS is particularly interested in stories that are underreported and represent diversity. Finally, Harney express the need to be passionate about your proposal and for that passion to show through when the proposal is read. Trust your instincts about your story, but recognize that you don't know everything and seek out advice of individuals not involved in your project. Whether that is Docs in Progress, as Harney used, or other third parties, it is important to get that external perspective. While closeness to your subject matter can give you better access, it is also necessary to make sure that your story is being told in a cohesive and engaging way for those who know nothing about the subject.



ASK AARON MARKUS

QUESTION:

I have heard that modeling agents typically take a 20 percent commission for any job they book. Is that fee negotiable?

-From Clint, AL:

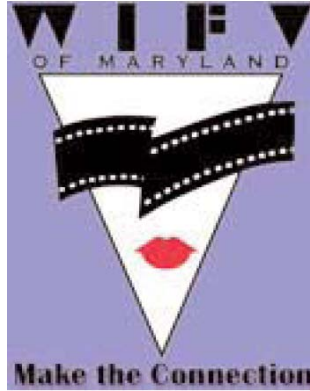
ANSWER:

Dear Clint:

Every modeling agent I have worked with took anywhere between 15 – 20% commissions. They actually work very hard for their money. I would not even think of trying to negotiate a smaller fee. Agents who are affiliated with the unions SAG and AFTRA, are only allowed to take a 10% commission for all acting jobs.



MEMBERS IN THE NEWS



Michelle Farrell

Despite the recession, WIFV-MD Member **Michelle Farrell** and **Absolute Independent Pictures** have been shooting full length feature movies continually since August, one project after the next. Currently Farrell is shooting *Law and Disorder* in DC (http://www.indiegogo.com/project/view/870?igref=IARL_SHWI), and early in March she will a movie short, *Cinderella 1984*, for Essex Community College, as well as a short for director Jason Blaustine entitled *Change is Coming*.. Meantime she is also teaching her “Saturday Film School” at CAMM, and looking for distribution for her award winning documentary film, *Unraveling Michelle* (www.unravelingmichelle.com). Her comment: “I feel very blessed to finally be receiving accolades for my cinematography and to be able to make films for a living.”

Steve Wallace

Member **Steve Wallace** advised that **Presentation Media** has audio visual services which can support you from the boardroom to the ballroom and everything in between. Presentation Media’s website: www.presmedia.com. On their site you can find descriptions of audio visual equipment rental services, photos of equipment that you can rent for your next meeting and also creative services. Some of the creative services they offer are PowerPoint presentations Flash presentations, CDROM authoring, Video digitization for use in CDROM’s, PowerPoint and web interactive displays for kiosk and tradeshow use.

Arlette Thomas-Fletcher

Arlette Thomas-Fletcher of Fruits of the Spirit Productions is looking for some vintage 18th century costumes for a full feature period film that is currently in development. If you have any information as to where she can find any items please contact her at childadvocates37@hotmail.com.

Craig Herron

Craig Herron of Herron Designs is currently working on *The House of Usher* and also an untitled feature film that takes place in 1950s. He is doing the production design and visual effects for the film.

Send Members in the News or any informational articles to
virginia.ryker@gmail.com.