

Published February 16th, 2011 The Economics of a Festival By Sophie Braccini



Moragans raised their hands when prompted on opening night Photo Doug Kohen

It cost about \$100,000 to put on the California Independent Film Festival (CAIFF). According to Program Director Beau Behan, this 13th edition of a Festival was the biggest ever and one of the most successful. There are a few secrets behind that cultural and economic success - the enthusiasm of what Behan calls a troop of highly skilled volunteers, and the fact that this year the facility was given to the Festival by the managers of the Rheem Theater.

"This year was the most 'black' of the past several years," says Behan, "and the one with the biggest attendance, with more than 3000 people coming to events and showings." The Festival suffered like the rest of the entertainment industry the past few years, and deciding to move it to remote Moraga could have seemed a risky business decision. But the community lived up to the expectations of the CAIFF Board. "We had 70 volunteers and more calling in to help," said Behan.

Community and Target Marketing Chair Carol Haag started working on outreach in November. Haag and her volunteers toured all the businesses in Lamorinda, contacted all the social clubs and reach out to everyone from Rossmoor to local day care centers. "It was a real grass-root effort," says Haag, "and we got an outpouring of support

from the community."

"During our opening and closing nights, 75% of the people who came were local," said Behan, "and all our events were sold out." It seems that when it is time to party, residents are willing and able. The other showings attracted moviegoers from across the Bay Area, according the CAIFF management. Ticket sales represented 55% of the total income of the Festival.

The local business community played a large role in supporting the Festival. For opening night all the food was donated by local restaurants, Amoroma, Chef Chow, China Moon, and Terzetto Cuisine. Captain Vineyards sold the wine at wholesale prices, and so did Pennini's on Closing Night. The return on their investment varied depending on where they were located. "The restaurants close to the Theater had some of their busiest times," said Chamber of Commerce President Edy Schwartz. On the other side of Town however, in the Moraga Center, Terzetto's Roos Pal reported a very disappointing outcome. "I will continue to back the Festival in the name of community support," said the business owner, "but it was not a boost for my business."

Additional income came from generous donors. One of them is The New Rheem Theater.

"The CAIFF Association is a non-profit and is the operator of the New Rheem Theater," explains Behan. "The Association is a venue sponsor for the Festival." In the past the non-profit had to pay the venue, the projectionist, the projector and all those are very costly. Behan explains that one of the motivations of the Board to become the operator of the theater was that cost factor.

Behan believes that the Festival benefits the Theater as well. "Some of the proceeds from the Festival are going into the improvements of the New Rheem, such as the sofas and the new projector," says Behan, "now we can put more into the renovation of the theater, like upgrading the sound system, and finishing the upgrade of the projection system."

CAIFF Board members, along with most of the volunteers, pledged to do it again in Moraga next year. "What is important is that we were involved in the Festival, that the theater shows some life, and that people know that we are here," said Haag.

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