

# Film festival joins sister cities

By Nicole Chavez  
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The 9th edition of the Binational Independent Film Festival took place in the borderland last week. For nine days, El Paso and Ciudad Juárez hosted distinguished film guests from all around the world to celebrate the independent film.

This year, the movies were shown at four venues: UTEP Union Cinema, Cinemark Cielo Vista, La Fe Clinic in El Paso and Centro Cultural Paso del Norte in Cd. Juárez.

"We are proud of supporting the Chamizal Film Festival, I think it is an opportunity for students interested in filmmaking," said Carol Roberts-Spence, director of UTEP's Union Programs Office.

The public enjoyed various productions not only from the United States and Mexico, but also from Chile, China, Great Britain, Canada, Ireland and Italy; and by both new and well-experienced directors.

"We have movies from all around the world, here is where different countries and people of various generations are joined," said Cesar Alejandro, executive director of the Binational Independent Film Festival.

Some of the feature movies shown in the festival were "Duska" (Holland), "The Bodyguard" (China), "JC Chavez" (Mexico), "Lake City" (U.S.) and "Polanski" (U.S.).

Every day, the public had the opportunity to meet and ask questions to different directors, producers, writers, and actors of the featured movies.

"After the movies you get on direct contact, something that everybody or most people in Los Angeles or New York get everyday and we don't have, that's why we bring them to you," Alejandro said.

One of the celebrity invitees was producer, director and actor Damian Chapa, known for his roles in "El Padrino," "Blood In, Blood Out," and "Street Fighter." Chapa presented his latest production, "Polanski," at the festival. Zalman King, writer of the movie "9 ½ weeks" was also in attendance.

In the ninth edition of the festival, the Lifetime Achievement Award honored Eric Del Castillo, a famous Mexican actor, for 52 years in film, television and theatre. Robert M. Young, director and producer, was also given the prestigious award for more than 30 years of documentary and filmmaking.

"I am so proud of being here; these types of festivals give new talents an opportunity to show their work," Del Castillo said. "New talents can express themselves in front of a public and they can hear different opinions from the public."

In a private ceremony, Del Castillo received the Crystal Bird Award from young director Chee Keong Cheung of Great Britain.

"I am so excited of delivering the award to Eric Del Castillo. He's a person that I respect because of his experience and amazing career," Cheung, who directed "The Bodyguard," said. "It's a privilege being here, meeting filmmakers from different places and sharing our experiences."

This year, the festival organizers collaborated with KFOX to create a new local high school competition, in which El Paso area students were able to show their filmmaking talents.

The contest consisted of making a 4-8 minute long documentary incorporating the theme: "What does El Paso mean to you?" The organizers received more than a dozen video entries. The documentary winners, a team of students from Mission Early College High School lead by Cassandra Barraza, were announced before the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the UTEP Union Cinema. The ceremony took place in the presence of distinguished guests Chapa, Del Castillo and actor David Shark.

"I like to film and edit videos, we went to different places such as UTEP and Ascarate Park," Barraza said. "Also we interviewed different people, we asked them what is El Paso for them."

The winners were surprised when Josh Sands, director of the Hollywood Film and Acting Academy, gave them a half-scholarship to study 16 weeks in Los Angeles.

"They will learn screenwriting, producing, directing, and editing video and sound, everything that they need to make their own independent film, all in our 16-week program," Sands said. "Our professors are active actors and directors, they really know what they teach."

For the 10th edition, Alejandro and the organizing staff plan to extend the competition to Cd. Juarez's high schools to help the development of new talents.

"Never give up, go for your dream, and you know what-- that one person can make the difference," Shark said.

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