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2>[Film Fest Touts Record Crowd, Satisfied Fans](#)

The Capital Times :: FRONT :: A10

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Rob Thomas The Capital Times

The ninth annual Wisconsin Film Festival drew in a record attendance of 28,700, according to final ticket tallies released Thursday.

The four-day festival exceeded last year's tally of 26,000, taking over 10 theaters in downtown Madison last weekend with a mix of independent, foreign and classic films.

Festival director Meg Hamel said she doesn't consider the raw attendance figures to necessarily be a benchmark for the festival's success. She said she puts more weight on the quality of the audience's experience at the festival.

"What I'm happy about isn't some raw number, that it's more than last year," she said. "It wouldn't have failed if 24,000 had come to the festival. What I'm excited about is how much people talked about the movies during the festival, how many comments I got from people who were really enjoying it, how many people came to the festival for the first time. How much I think a lot of these films will linger in the audience's minds."

Hamel said she and her volunteers have spent a busy post-festival week returning films and materials and doing all the necessary accounting. She said she's also looking forward to going to see a movie at the UW-Cinematheque film series this weekend, purely as a member of the audience.

She'll also look at ways to better the festival for its 10th incarnation in 2008, including the possibility of lengthening the festival by a couple of days, and perhaps reducing the number of films that screen late on Sunday, when attendance has historically flagged a bit.

Winners of the festival's jury prizes and Audience Award, in which patrons used a paper ballot to vote for their favorites, were announced Thursday.

Winning the Audience Award for Best Narrative Film was Goran Dukic's "Wristcutters: A Love Story," a quirky and dark romantic comedy set in a purgatory for suicide victims.

Getting the nod from the audience for Best Documentary was Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine's "War/Dance," about students in a Ugandan refugee camp preparing for a music and dance competition. The film won a Directing Award at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

The festival also has two jury competitions open to filmmakers with Wisconsin ties and short films by Wisconsin students. Winning the Wisconsin Best Documentary Feature prize was Romi Chiorean and Katherine Leggett's "The Untyings," which follows Chiorean's trip back to his parents' Romanian homeland, where he learns why they had an exorcism performed on him when he was a teenager.

In the other "Wisconsin's Own" categories: Doug Gritzmacher and Mike Dechant's "Bone Mixers" won for Best Documentary Short; Luke K. Pebler's "The Professor's Daughter," won for Best Narrative Short; and Dal Lazlo and Charles Johannsen's "Walk Into Hell/Purgatorio" won for Best Experimental Short. Cecilia Condit's "Little Spirits" was awarded a Special Jury Prize, and Brian D. Nelson's "Tops" won the Kodak Opportunity Film Stock Grant.

For student films, Alan Schoenburg's "The Bird of Night" won for Best Experimental Short, Tim Ziegler's "Pinmonkey" won for Best Narrative Short, and Chele Isaac's "The Long Shadow" won for Best Animated Short.

Anna Krutzik's "Me and Jean Pierre" won a Special Jury Prize, and Joe Sacco's "Black Box" won the Kodak Opportunity Student Film Stock Grant.

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