



Professionals steer locally based film fest

By Bill Thompson
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The formative Charleston International Film Festival, slated to unspool May 1-4, is the latest attempt to draw area audiences into the embrace of the independent cinema.

This time, there are professionals at the helm.

To be coordinated by Summer Spooner, current managing director of the Beverly Hills Film Festival, and her business partner, College of Charleston grad Brian Peacher, the new festival plans to showcase as many as 40 "nonstudio" films, including features, shorts and documentaries, as well as panel discussions, seminars and a screenplay competition.

The organizers have set a target operating budget of \$50,000 for the inaugural fest, which will be held at the Terrace Theater on James Island.

Entries already have been received from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Uganda and Cambodia, says Peacher.

"Brian had the idea of bringing a festival to Charleston, which we regard as such a rich arts and culture city," says Spooner, whose first feature film as producer, "Lie to Me," is scheduled for release in 2008. "What makes ours different is that we know how to organize a festival; I have the experience to know what works and what doesn't work."

The CIFF expects to have approximately 500 entries, which will be distilled to 40.

"We're going to have a mixture of movies, but all will be professionally made independent films," Spooner says. "We like to think of them as hidden gems. Few are going to be showing in theaters. The idea is to get them publicity and introduce the films and filmmakers to the community. We want to show movies that haven't been shown anywhere. Some of them will be world premieres."

The festival lineup will be announced in March.

Although nonstudio films are the focus, the organizers hope to have a major independent theatrical release for the opening-night screening.

All films submitted to the CIFF will be evaluated based on "excellence in quality and originality." For guidelines and fees, visit www.charlestoniff.com.

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