

Local News

BHS grad wins prize at Wisconsin Film Festival

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MADISON — Dan Wiersgalla enrolled in film school partly to set an example for his son.

The 34-year-old Burlington High School grad has a 4-minute short film he shot for school that will be shown during this weekend's Wisconsin Film Festival in Madison. The film won a prize in the festival's "Wisconsin's Own" category.

The festival opened Thursday and runs through Sunday. Wiersgalla, a 1993 BHS graduate, entered his film "Beelin." It is a "no budget" film he shot in Hayward, Wis., with a cast of family and friends, including former Racine and Burlington residents.

After attending four colleges, Wiersgalla earned an archaeology degree from the University of Minnesota. He's worked for an environmental non-profit for 10 years and enrolled in film school in 2007. He is a single dad living in Minneapolis.

Wiersgalla's film will be shown with several other short films beginning at 1 p.m. Sunday at the Chazen Museum of Art, 800 University Ave., Madison.

What is the film and what is it about?

It's called "Beelin," which is short for snowmobilin.' It's a short film about love, relationships, in a very abstract way. It's about two groups of people, men and women and their interactions on snowmobiles, set in the north woods. The way I explain it, it's a mash-up between Busby Berkeley and Michael Jackson with a little bit of north woods thrown in.

Why did you decide to enter the film in this festival?

It was kind of on a whim. A friend said they go to the festival in Madison and saw my film and said I should enter it. I had submitted it to a couple of other festivals and it didn't get accepted. I grudgingly did. As luck would have it, it got accepted and I received a jury prize.

Why enter your films in festivals?

It's a curiosity. You make art for yourself. I also make it to be shown and exhibited, to foster discussion, to get praise, to get criticism. I felt really great about this piece. I had this commitment from friends and family, 'come away with me for an entire weekend and work really hard on this vision that I have.'

I wanted to see if anyone outside of my circle of friends would enjoy it. Getting those first couple of rejections was really kind of telling. I thought maybe it wasn't ready for prime time. To get in (to the Wisconsin Film Festival) was huge. To go on to win a prize just bowled me over.

What got you interested in filmmaking?

I've been doing still photography since I was a kid and really loved it. I took a short course a long while back in 16-mm film. I'd been doing still images for a long time.

There was just this moment for me when I saw all these things I knew about still photography come to life in films. I have a son, Henry, who is 6. I always figured I will tell him one day to go out and pursue what he is passionate about. I felt like I hadn't necessarily set the example yet.

IF YOU GO

What: Wisconsin Film Festival

When: Saturday and Sunday

Where: Various venues throughout Madison

Cost: General tickets \$7; student tickets \$4

For more information check online at <http://www.wifilmfest.org> and <http://dannyapolis.com/>.

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