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U-rah-rah! 'Being Bucky' is fan fave at Wisconsin Film Festival

Jane Burns

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The documentary "Being Bucky" was a hit at the Wisconsin Film Festival. - Kris Ugarriza

Being Bucky, the mascot, is already a good thing for the guys who get the job as the state's most famous furry face. Being "Being Bucky," the film, is a good thing these days, too.

The documentary about the Wisconsin mascot and the seven students who wear the costume was named one of the Audience Award winners at last weekend's Wisconsin Film Festival. "Being Bucky" was named best documentary; "Departures," a Japanese film about a funeral professional, was named best narrative film. The film, which won an Academy Award earlier this year for best foreign language film, was a last-minute addition to the festival.

"What I like is the two films couldn't be more different," said festival director Meg Hamel. "Maybe it's a metaphor for what the Wisconsin Film Festival is trying to do. I work really hard to try to bring significant stories from around the world and give the audience a chance to see films that represent other cultures. And then there's also this really wonderful foundation that exists to show and promote Wisconsin films and stories. 'Being Bucky' is as Wisconsin as it gets."

The Audience Award winners are voted on by filmgoers during the four-day festival and were announced on Wednesday. Filmgoers are asked to rate films on a scale of one through five, and the films with the highest average score are named the winners. It's the only award given out after the festival; the juried "Wisconsin's Own" winners were announced prior to the festival.

The timing of the Audience Award is good for "Being Bucky." The film returns to Madison this weekend at Point Cinemas. On Saturday, the 7 p.m. show will include an appearance by Bucky Badger, the young men who play Bucky and filmmakers John Fromstein and Scott Smith.

"It's going to be kind of a happening," said Fromstein, the film's executive producer.

The film festival showing sold out quickly, and a curious audience asked more questions of the guys who were featured in the film than of the filmmakers, Fromstein said.

"Nobody ever gets a chance to talk to them about that," Fromstein said. "It's not a secret who is Bucky, but nobody really gets to talk to Bucky. This was a chance for them to come out from inside the costume and get their 15 minutes of fame."

"Being Bucky" tracks about a year in the life of Bucky Badger. The filmmakers start with the tryouts and then through Bucky's busy year. Besides following the Bucky's through their official events, the film also spends time with them outside the suit, visiting their families and homes.

The seven students featured in the film gave the filmmakers the Bucky thumbs up, Fromstein said.

"They loved it," he said. "What we're hearing is we did a good job capturing what the whole Bucky gestalt is. I'm glad to hear that because it took us a while to figure out how to structure the film. We finally figured it out, and people seem to respond to it."

After its Madison run, the film will play in Green Bay. Fromstein said so far no other state showings are scheduled.

"Departures" is scheduled to return to Madison later in the spring, Hamel said.