

For the love of films and cookies

Indie festivals merge in the mills

By **LIZ GOTTHELF**
Staff Writer

BIDDEFORD — Cookies in the Mill brought independent films, film directors, and film buffs together on Saturday at the North Dam Mill building.

Cookies in the Mill was a merging of two previous film festivals. Kari Wagner said she and fellow organizer Holly Haywood, both of University of New England Media Services, ran a film festival called Cookies Shorts, "because we love films and we love cookies."

Jessica Peck and Brendan Wallach ran a film festival in Biddeford called Mill Dance, "to honor the people who worked in the mills," said Peck. The groups merged together and became Cookies in the Mill.

Mary Leaming, a student at University of New England and an organizer of the event, said that the festival was a way to integrate the University and the downtown community and to utilize the large open spaces that the mills provide.

Wagner said she preferred the mill space to the rooms of an academic building.

"Other places are high tech, and too perfect. This lends itself to film," she said.

"The festival brings people together in an unpretentious way," said Haywood.

Steve Stuart, a producer of comedies from Beverly, Mass., said he liked the atmosphere of the festival. "Biddeford, Maine is cool. I saw a guy here when we drove up with a plaid shirt and a baseball cap ... That's



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Film directors Jim Miller, Steve Stuart, and Kevin Anderton discuss film making during a break at the Cookies in the Mill film festival Saturday. All three directors traveled from Massachusetts to attend the event.

going to be me when I'm old, here in Biddeford, Maine, showing my films," he said.

Stuart was one of a handful of people who trekked north from Massachusetts to attend the festival.

Sean Foy drove up three hours from Plymouth, Mass. It may seem like a far stretch to go for a film festival, but Foy explained that it was actually a more manageable distance than other film festivals. Foy, who directs narratives, has shown his films in festivals throughout the country, including Arizona and Pennsylvania. This was one festival he had entered to which he could finally drive. He was looking forward to watching his film later that afternoon and

seeing the reactions of festival goers.

"It's fun to be here. Usually I just watch my films with friends who pretend to like them. Today I'll get to watch it with people I don't know," he said.

At the entrance to the building was a table where pins that said the word "yes" were scattered next to a plate of free cookies.

The word "yes" signified the theme of the festival, which was to say yes to all entries. No submission was denied, and none of the entries screened were judged.

This created a relaxed, low pressure environment that Wagner said attracted a

diverse crowd.

"We have a whole spectrum of directors, from high school students to professionals," said Wagner.

Haywood said that the festival inspired people to show their films and gave them the confidence to look at other styles.

"I don't think there's anything better than that. Artists suffer enough rejection," she said.

Showing on the screen were over 50 short films from as far away as Hong Kong, Spain, and Armenia. The films ranged in length from one to 11 minutes.

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