

Israeli Film Festival comes to Deerfield Valley

By Christian Avard

WEST DOVER- Israel's film industry has been growing by leaps and bounds the last twenty years and to celebrate its diversity, the Deerfield Valley will host the first Israeli film and food festival on Sunday, August 19. Presented by the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community, the Israeli film and food festival will take place at the Mountain Park Cinema and will feature award-winning films from Israel and a light buffet lunch featuring traditional Israeli and Middle Eastern foods.

"This is the first year of the Israeli film and food festival and the purpose is twofold. One, it's a fundraiser for the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community and two, the theme of this fundraiser is really to talk about the vibrancy of Jewish cinema," said Marty Cohn, board member of the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community. "One of the things we wanted to do was differentiate between Israeli and Jewish. In terms of Jewish films, many people think in terms of Jewish themes, something religious or based on the Holocaust or something like that and a Jewish film can be made anywhere. What we wanted to do was to specifically choose Israeli film because we wanted to expose folks to the vibrancy of the industry."

Shir Heharim (meaning "Song of the Mountains") serves as the synagogue for the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community and is part of the largest Jewish reform movement in North America, the Union for Jewish Reform. According to their Web site, there are approximately 1.5 million Reform Jews and more than 900 congregations. Shir Heharim is the closest synagogue to the Deerfield Valley and one of four Union of Reform Judaism chapters located in Vermont; the others are in Bennington, Burlington, and Woodstock.

"The group focuses on the Brattleboro area and it's a reformed congregation," said Cohn. "We've been around for 36 years. Our physical building is in Brattleboro but our members come from West Dover to Chester, so it's a pretty good sweep."

Faith Schuster, of West Dover, and administrator for the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community, acknowledges the Jewish community in the Deerfield Valley is quite small, but doesn't include second-home owners. In addition, the valley has

also been a popular spot to hold events for the Brattleboro Area Jewish community.

"We don't have many members in this area but we do have some seasonal members who are skiers or summer people and maintain a membership," said Schuster. "We've run the summer fundraisers in the Deerfield Valley the last four summers. We did a program last August with a fashion show, a luncheon, a standup rabbi comedian, and music at the town hall. We also get a great response from the ski communities: Timber Creek, Green Spring, Seasons, and Chimney Hill. They've given us a lot of support."

As for the film festival, Schuster says it was just time to try something different.

"We didn't want to do the same thing and Marty was pushing the idea of celebrating the diversity and artistic achievement of Israeli film so we decided to go with it," said Schuster. "The Mountain Park Cinema worked best to show the films and overall, the altruistic idea is to attract a lot of people and become familiar with what's coming out of Israel in terms of creative work. The less altruistic is (to raise money) for a building fund for a synagogue in Brattleboro. It's a fun summer activity; we want to keep it in the valley, bring people in the area, and give them some interesting activity."

In addition, Cohn is amazed with the response it's getting and many people outside of the congregation are buying tickets.

"One of the things that's interesting about that is there are 180 seats in the theater and so far we have sold about 150," said Cohn. "What's really interesting about that is about 40% of the seats that we sold were sold to members of our congregation. Which means, flipping it around, that 60% are not members, meaning what we're doing is we've touched on nerves or the interest in the greater Brattleboro area and exposing people to the Israeli film."

The festival will be showing two films, both of which were produced and won awards in Israel. "Syrian Bride," directed by Eran Riklis, is a political film about a Druze wedding (a Middle Eastern religious community rooted in Islam) and examines how the Arab-Israeli conflict affects the lives of a particular family. "'Syrian Bride' has a scene that is very intriguing but it also shows that a movie

that talks about politics could also be not something that's clearly black and white," said Cohn.

The second movie, "Walk on Water," directed by Eytan Fox, is an action movie dealing with masculinity and homosexuality themes. In "Walk on Water," Eyal, an Israeli Mossad agent, is given the mission to track down and kill an ex-Nazi officer. Pretending to be a tourist guide, he befriends the officer's grandson Axel, in Israel to visit his sister Pia. The two men set out on a tour of the country during which Axel challenges Eyal's values. "This film contains certain messages but it's as good as any American-made film," said Cohn.

In addition to films, the festival will feature a light buffet lunch comprising a number of Israeli and Middle Eastern foods.

"For lunch there is hummus, chopped salad, spinach squares, pita bread, big chicken legs with tzatziki (a cold yogurt garlic and cucumber sauce), and desserts," said Cohn. There are items found in the Mideast and Israel, such as rugelach, mandelbrut, ravani (a sweet syrup-soaked nutcake), cookies, and fruit.

Cohn and Schuster are excited about what the Israeli film and food festival will bring to the valley and believe it will benefit more than just the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community.

"The whole concept demonstrates the vibrancy of Israeli cinema and to expose folks not only in our own community but anyone who's interested in the depth and breadth of the Israeli film industry," said Cohn. "It's an opportunity to see some award-winning Israeli films, taste some delicious Israeli-Middle Eastern foods, learn about the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community, and get to meet some wonderful folks who share a desire for film and food."

Tickets are \$18 in advance, \$25 at the door. For more information contact the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community office at (802) 257-1959, Faith Schuster at (802) 464-2632, or visit their Web site at www.bajcvermont.org.

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