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Wild and Scenic Film Festival pumps local businesses

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Laura Mahaffy/lmahaffy@theunion.com | The Union

SYRCL employees Rachel Hutchinson and Amelia Workman hang the festival headquarters sign for the Wild and Scenic Film Festival at the National Hotel in Nevada City Thursday.

Know and Go

What: 14th Annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Where: various venues in Nevada City and Grass Valley

When: Jan. 14 to Jan. 18

Transportation: A FREE shuttle will provide transportation around Nevada City and between Nevada City and Grass Valley Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The shuttle will run every 20 minutes. The National Hotel (NC), The Center for the Arts (GV), Alpha Building (NC), Elks Lodge (NC), and Rood Center (NC)—then back to The National, etc.

Schedule of businesses:

Friday 6-11pm

Saturday 8:30am-11pm

Sunday 9am-4:30pm

For more information, please visit
<https://www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org>

tickets were purchased by people who live in Nevada City or Grass Valley. This means more than 54 percent of participants are coming from out of town.

“It is a world-class event that we are thrilled to contribute to. It’s not only got world-class film production, but it has also brought a welcome vitality to our community.” Mark Prestwich city manager of Nevada City

“According to our survey, visitors spend at least one night in a hotel in our community, that means more than 2,500 people in our local hotels, probably having one or more meals, and shopping in stores,” Dardick said.

Attendance has enjoyed quite a surge over the years. More than 3,500 people participated in 2012, and in 2015, that number had grown to over 5,500.

Ticket sales jumped 30 percent from 2012 to 2015, Dardick said.

“It stimulates the economy for January,” said Cathy Whittlesey, executive director of the Nevada City Chamber of Commerce. “January and February are usually very slow for the businesses, and things like this will help. It just freshens us up for the next season when tourists get geared up.”

Local shop owners have a secret weapon when it comes to January, a rather sluggish month for retail when holiday banners are hauled down and the throngs of visitors who crowded streets during New Year and Christmas disappear.

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival, now approaching its 14th anniversary, attracts thousands of out-of-town visitors every year who stay in local hotels, then visit restaurants and stores in between various programs. The increased traffic injects much needed vitality to the local tourism industry.

“People come and they see the movies, they realize this is a very beautiful town and want to come back,” said Caleb Dardick, executive director of South Yuba River Citizens League, which produces the festival. “We have heard a lot of similar anecdotes.”

According to Dardick, the festival sold more than 6,000 tickets this year, and only 44 percent of those

What started in 2003 as a fundraiser for SYRCL has gradually evolved into a world-class event that showcases environmental and adventure films.

Over the years, the festival expanded from a one and a half-day event at Miners Foundry into a five-day festival with more than 10 venues in Nevada City and Grass Valley.

Dardick said the event, which kicked off Thursday and ends Monday, has three major goals. It raises awareness on environmental issues and inspires activism. Secondly, it supports SYRCL and its year-round work to protect the Yuba River. And last but not least, the festival backs local businesses during a slow time of the year.

“It is a world-class event that we are thrilled to contribute to. It’s not only got world-class film production, but it has also brought a welcome vitality to our community,” said Mark Prestwich, city manager of Nevada City.

During a meeting on Nov. 18, City Council of Nevada City allocated \$10,000 from the Economic Development Fund to SYRCL.

Prestwich said that amount amounted to only 2 percent of the revenue the festival brings to the local economy, which was estimated to be about \$225,000 annually based on materials presented by the organization during that meeting.

In 2012, the festival, which was traditionally based in Nevada City, accomplished an essential step.

It expanded to Grass Valley to accommodate the flux of visitors from out of town, a decision welcomed by Grass Valley officials and business owners.

“It’s something that’s grown every year in Grass Valley for the last three years,” said Vice Mayor Howard Levine. “The festival has been in Nevada City for 14 years, and we hope more people will use it in Grass Valley because of the venues we have.”

Keith Davies, executive director of the Grass Valley Chamber of Commerce, pointed to Grass Valley hotels, restaurants and wine tasting rooms as major benefactors of the festival.

“Even though the bulk of the festival remains in Nevada City, it’s slowly coming over to Grass Valley,” said Davies. “We hope that the continual growth will spill over to Grass Valley now that we have (the downtown association) and The Center for the Arts involved.”

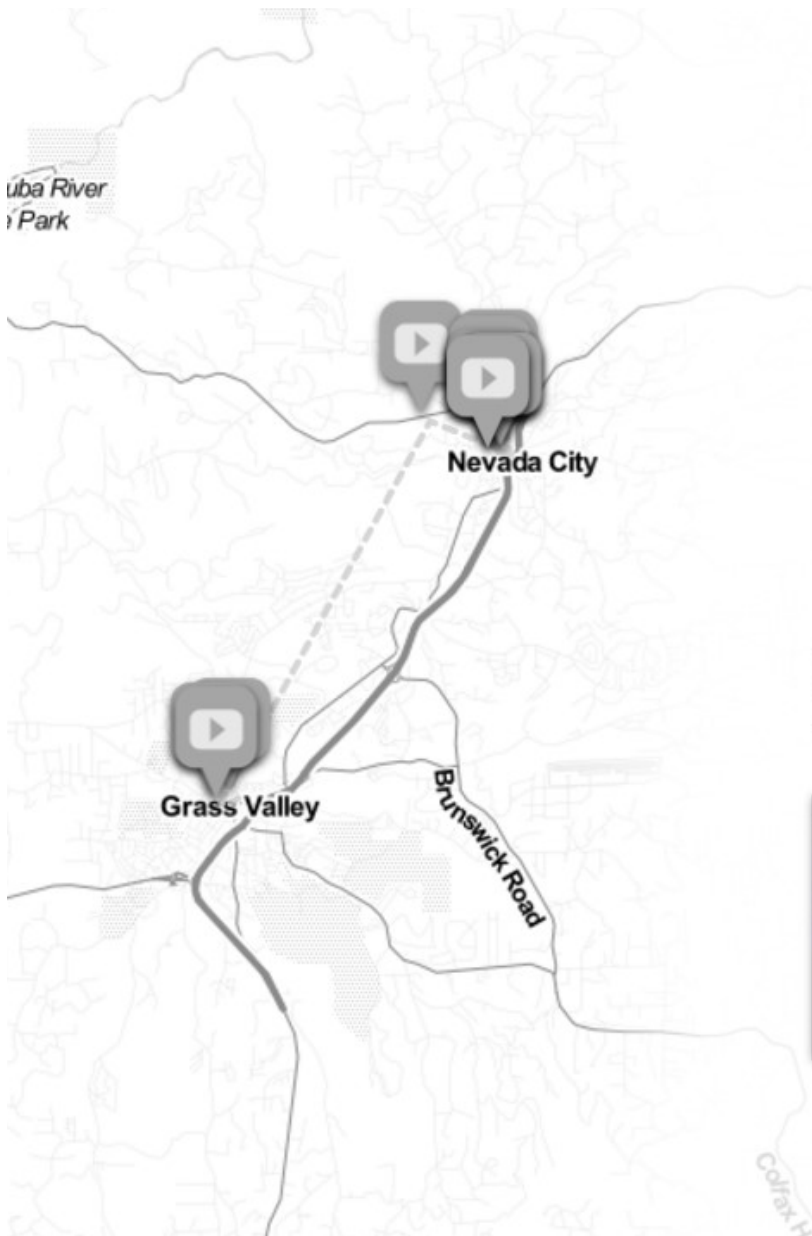
In 2012, the festival inaugurated a presence in Grass Valley with a special event featuring Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now. Dardick said the program lineup in Grass Valley this year includes three venues showing films, plus two special events and a teen summit facilitated by Julia Butterfly Hill.

“This represents a three-fold increase in film showings over last year’s programs,” he added.

WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL: FRIDAY SCHEDULE



Start Exploring



Dardick said nearly 100 businesses in the community collaborate with SYRCL through cash sponsorships and other means.

The Gold Miners Inn in Grass Valley had offered itself up as a lodging facility for filmmakers for almost seven years. But General Manager Sean Gilleran said he has also seen an uptick in the number of other visitors.

Also experiencing a lift in sales is Lefty's Grill in Nevada City. Owner John Cammack said he estimated 25 percent more patrons visited his restaurant when the festival takes place.

"It's nice to have a little boost and a weekend of tourists during a usually slow week," said Cammack.

But Levine reminded people another reason the festival is so successful is the message it disseminates.

“The film festival is part of a basic understanding of how important the Yuba watershed is for our community,” Levine said. “SYRCL is an ambassador for our whole waterway.”

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Number of visitors at the Wild & Scenic Film Festival from 2012-2015

