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MAGAZINE

THE REEL DEAL

EVIE COLBERT AND OTHER KEY PLAYERS TALK ABOUT
THE MONTCLAIR FILM FESTIVAL

A MONTCLAIR WEDDING

THE HOME AS PRIVATE RESORT

PLUS: WALKING, CYCLING, LIFTING AND
EATING YOUR WAY TO GOOD HEALTH

A photograph of four people (two men and two women) standing in front of a large movie screen. The screen displays the title 'MONTCLAIR FILM FESTIVAL THE BACKSTORY' in a stylized font, framed by a border of yellow lights. The people are dressed in semi-formal attire. The man on the far left wears glasses and a blue striped tie. The woman next to him wears a black and white polka-dot top. The woman next to her wears a dark purple blouse. The man on the far right is bald and wears a red and blue striped tie. They are all smiling at the camera.

MONTCLAIR FILM FESTIVAL THE BACKSTORY

BY ROSELEE BLOOSTON PHOTOS BY ANNE-MARIE CARUSO

The first annual Montclair Film Festival, which runs this week through Sunday, is the collaboration of a large cast of individuals. Here, we shine a spotlight on four who've played leading roles in bringing it to the screen(s).

FROM CONCEPT TO CREATION

Two years ago, Montclair resident and general counsel to WNET, Bob Feinberg, was driving his then-colleague John Servidio around his hometown, hoping that his friend would move there. After Feinberg pointed out the Clairidge Theater and talked up its independent film showings, Servidio nonchalantly asked, "When is the film festival?" An idea was born.

Since then, Servidio did indeed move to Montclair, while stepping back from festival duties to manage public TV station WLIW-21. This left co-founder Feinberg to take the reins as the Montclair Film Festival's chairman of the board.

In that capacity, New Jersey native Feinberg recruits board members, who give both financial and active support. He also hires staff – most recently, the festival's new co-directors, Raphaela Neihausen and Thom Powers, whom he calls "the real deal" – and works tirelessly to raise funds through grants and corporate sponsorships. In addition, he has assembled a stellar advisory board that includes town residents Jonathan Alter, Stephen Colbert and former resident Olympia Dukakis.

Feinberg and his team have established institutional partnerships with the Montclair Art Museum, the Wellmont Theatre, Montclair State University, the Adult School of Montclair and, of course, the local Clearview Cinemas – the Bellevue and the Clairidge – where most of the festival's films are being shown.

The festival has three unique focal points: comedy, with support from Colbert and Comedy Central; women, in partnership with local grassroots group BlueWaveNJ; and New Jersey films and filmmakers. Feinberg hopes the combination will create Sundance-like electricity. This energetic leader expects the Montclair Film Festival to "take its place among the high-quality regional festivals around the country" as a forum for filmmakers, students and casual filmgoers. For now, he's happy that the "cockamamie" idea he and Servidio concocted has created the biggest buzz Montclair has heard in a long time. ➤





DIRECTING DUO

Husband and wife team Thom Powers and Raphaela Neihausen bring their professional expertise to the Montclair Film Festival as its directors. The two New Yorkers recently relocated to Montclair, along with their two-year-old son, Bez. "Like many new parents living in Manhattan who are interested in the arts, Montclair's been beckoning to us for quite some time," Neihausen says.

The couple met five years ago at the Berlin Film Festival where Neihausen, a former management consultant, premiered her first documentary. "I went all the way around the world to meet somebody from my own town," she says. Powers has produced and directed documentaries for HBO, and programmed the Toronto Film Festival, the largest in North America.

Before coming on board with the Montclair Film Festival, Neihausen and Powers ran *Stranger Than Fiction*, a weekly documentary film series that Powers started in 2005, at the IFC Center in Manhattan. The two have applied that partnership experience to launching Montclair Film Festival's inaugural season. Neihausen manages operational details, while Powers oversees the programming and artistic vision of the festival. "We're very lucky, in that we enjoy working together," Neihausen says.

The couple plans to expand the festival's year-round activities with more outdoor screenings in the summer, an on-going Kidz Shortz film competition, and educational programming like the Behind the Screen conference the festival held last December at Montclair State University.

Powers sees the Montclair Film Festival as a positive force, with economic and educational benefits for the community.

"It shows young people a way in which arts can be a transformative part of life," he says. He hopes that five years hence the festival will be "locked on people's calendars. It's such a unique event."

MAKING IT HAPPEN

When Evelyn McGee and Stephen Colbert were growing up in Charleston, S.C., the Spoleto Festival had a huge impact on each of them. For Evie Colbert, as she is now known, the world-famous festival opened up the possibility of a professional life in the theater. She moved to New York City to study acting and pursue a career, but later switched her focus to fundraising for non-profit theaters and theater production.

She and her husband have lived in Montclair for the past 12 years. "There's such a large arts community, so many journalists, so many people in media here, we just felt at home," she says. As a stay-at-home mom raising three children, Evie was looking for a suitable outlet for her talents in the community she loves.

When Bob Feinberg approached the Colberts about creating a local film festival, they became founding members, and recruited others to make the dream a reality. Evie currently serves as secretary of the board, and has helped craft the organization's mission statement, planned screenings, sought sponsorships, and planned and hosted fundraising events. The most successful of these was Stephen's sold-out appearance with best-selling author and journalist Jonathan Alter at the Wellmont Theatre last December. "That was a big shot in the arm for us," she says.

This indefatigable booster imagines that eventually the Montclair Film Festival will have a ripple effect, bringing audiences back to the town, "to that restaurant we went to when we saw that movie, or to shop at that little store we passed on the way to the theater." She knows that just as Spoleto strengthened Charleston, the Montclair Film Festival can enhance the town from which it takes its name. ■

For information on festival screenings, go to www.montclairfilmfest.org.

