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Top Stories

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*by David Fleischer*

A new film festival aims to take York Region's character as one of the country's most diverse communities, for better or worse, and put it up on screen.

The theme of the inaugural York Region Multimedia Film Festival "Rich Tapestry, Mosaic Images," aims to get beyond the portrayal of a homogenous, wealthy district.

"The whole reputation is that it's a collection of neighborhoods and communities that are relatively affluent," said film development council member Philip Rose-Donahoe.

But beneath that are issues of poverty, homelessness, violence against women and other stories that need to be told, he said.

A film festival about York Region for York Region has the potential to contribute both artistically and socially to the discussion.

The idea originated not with a group of frustrated filmmakers but with Michael Bowe, supervisor of diversity and outreach for the York Region Children's Aid Society

He leads a multimedia film development council that includes an array of organizations from the Catholic and public school boards and York University, to Family Services of York Region, Blue Door Shelters and the towns of Georgina and Markham.

Those two municipalities will host the first screenings but organizers already have their sights set on a region wide expansion next year.

In the long-term, the council hopes to have some kind of permanent facility for local filmmakers, something Mr. Rose-Donahoe pitched to regional councilors Wednesday.

Funding is a challenge for any upstart arts group and organizers are leveraging in-kind donations and hope to land grants.

"It's a big challenge of course. But we think there's a lot of focus now in York Region on the creative economy, the creative class," Mr. Rose-Donahoe said.

The increased prevalence of technology makes movies an ideal medium for exploring the region, he said.

"There's this idea that film is a new way of telling stories. It's different from a photo or an essay."

Any kind of moving media image - including movies, animation and multimedia presentations - is welcome at the festival, so long as it was created after September 2007 and "informs and educates on life in York Region."

Local schools have worked filmmaking into the curriculum and the public board, partners since day one, has folded its own film festival into the larger effort.

"The Board's commitment to arts-based programs ... is rooted in an increased understanding of the need to engage all aspects of our students' interests and potentials," board project manager Scott Milne said.

"The festival is also is a reflection of our desire to hear the voices of students, as well as members of the community."

Submissions have already included films about King Township and Georgina Island's aboriginal population.

Shutterbugs are also encouraged to send in photographs that capture "the beauty, challenges, or the rich heritage that is York Region," as part of an ancillary exhibition.

A programming committee will select projects for the adjudicated stream as well as others to screen online or alongside the main festival.

A formal launch takes place in early March with school and public screenings in Georgina and Markham on May 7 and 8.

Awards will be handed out in several categories at a closing gala at the region's administrative headquarters in Newmarket.

You can learn more at [www.yorkregionfilmfestival.ca](http://www.yorkregionfilmfestival.ca)

#### CAN I STILL SUBMIT SOMETHING?

The deadline for submissions is Feb. 15 at 5 p.m. but the contest is open to anyone ages 6 years and up, regardless of experience. There are different categories for different ages.

Films can be up to 30 minutes in length while photo voices and animations can be as long as eight minutes.

You don't have to live in York Region but the submission must have local content.