

Around Town

Real movie fans prefer Palm Beach Film Fest over others

If you want bright lights, head for the big city. Big bucks and exotic cars and a penthouse suite? Try Cannes. Mucho-chic and mucho celeb? Make Sundance your destination.

But if you stay around as the credits roll to learn who shot and edited ... if you care about what actors do on the screen, not off ... if you love cinema on a small screen ... in other words, if you're a real movie fan, then the **Palm Beach International Film Festival** is for you.

Sure, you get names. The previous 19 festivals have attracted the likes of **Esther Williams**, **Selma Hayek**, **Jeremy Renner** and **Jennifer Lawrence**. This year, **Jason Priestley** touted his first directing job; **Robert Morse**, still going at 82, offered proof that the really talented can blithely slip from stage to movies to TV without blinking. Occasionally a sleeper wakes up: *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, first screened in Palm Beach, made \$350 million.

You get parties — just not as lavish — after major screenings at Bogart's in Boca's **Cinemark Palace 20** and a VIP bash at **Eau Palm Beach** for a very un-Hollywood \$75.

No battery of searchlights, no chauffeured Bentley or Rolls limo to deliver Priestley and Morse to the theaters and no blinding spotlights inside. Down in front, mikes in hand, in the same low light as their audience, they spoke from the heart about their work.

"We can't bring in big a filmmaker and pay for all his expenses," festival President **Randi Emerman** said, noting that it survives on a budget around \$100,000. "A lot of people from the industry are here, and what they see in the program here is far superior to many other festivals that have lots more money to spend. We



Robert Morse with Randi Emerman and Rick McCoy at the Palm Beach International Film Festival. Photo provided

put a lot of detail into nailing down the best program we can.

"To do it right, we would need a budget of \$700,000, which is still a lot less than many festivals that don't have near the quality. We're able to do it on a budget of less than \$100,000 because a lot of talented people are willing to help and our volunteers have stepped up big time."

Emerman was thrilled that Cinemark finally joined **Muvico** and **Cobb** as presenters. She also singled out the contribution of **Burt Rapoport**, who hosted three post-screening events at his **Bogart's** in-theater restaurant in Boca.

Tie-ins with Sundance and Toronto give Palm Beach more credibility. The filmmakers take good vibes about the area to their home countries, and down the road that brings people, and money, back.

And although Emerman wonders every year if the festival will return, she already is planning. After all, it will be the 20th. "I just wish we could get more people who live here

to come out," she said. "I still haven't figured that out."

For every **Selma Hayek** or **Robert Redford**, the movie business attracts the likes of **Randy Ringer** and **Grace McPhillips**, dedicated to their craft or a cause and eager to grab any opportunity to tout their work.

For much of her life, Ringer has worked in professional baseball, including 15 years with the New York Mets. Now she's latched on to the Asian version of *Field of Dreams*. She teamed up with filmmaker **Mirra Bank** to push *The Only Real Game*. Based in Manipuri, a region in northwest India, it tells the story of residents that have played baseball since 1944 when American GIs were managing air deliveries to Asia. Today the region is wracked with unemployment, drug and gun violence and HIV/AIDS, yet the residents still play baseball. And Ringer will be delighted to bend your ear about it.

McPhillips was a teenage beauty queen in Alabama, studied at **Elon College** in North Carolina, toured with Broadway theater companies and made the occasional movie before marrying and settling down in Chicago. She's on the Midwest board of **Screen Actors Guild** and founded **Chicago Acting in Film Meetup**, a professional organization for

actors in the Chicago area.

McPhillips came to Delray to plug *The Other One* as writer, producer and star. Several other films are in the works, plus a trip to Cannes this month, then back to Chicago where she and husband **Corbett Lunsford** also run **Green Dream Group**. Its goal: to make Chicago a better place for everyone to live by improving buildings through independent, scientific building diagnostics.

Yet she still must pinch her pennies. After a media meet-and-greet at Delray's new downtown Hyatt, she had a screening of *The Other One* at Boca's Cinemark. How far is it? How much is a cab? — she asked in quick succession. Fortunately for her, a festival fan offered her a ride. Imagine that happening in Cannes?

More news from the **Rapoport** kitchen: **Burt** has broken ground on **Apiero Kitchen & Bar**, at **The Marketplace** in Delray. Right next door to **Burt & Max's**, his joint venture with **Dennis Max**, it'll offer Mediterranean cuisine.

And concerns about parking by **Rapoport** and other merchants and patrons may be assuaged somewhat by the County Commission. Members voted April 24 to allow the center to use four additional acres in the adjacent

agricultural reserve for 439 parking spaces, a 40 percent increase. In exchange, the center's developers agreed to preserve nine acres for agriculture and open space. Perhaps they could erect an educational center, a model farm, where kids and adults, as well, could learn where milk, eggs, filet mignon, and the like, come from.

Meanwhile, let's hope **Burt** and his four executive chefs can find a parking space in Manhattan when they visit the **James Beard House** on May 22. At the invitation of the **Beard Foundation**, **Jon Greening** of **Deck 84**, **Jay Prisco** of **Burt & Max's**, **Ben Burger** of **Henry's** and corporate pastry chef **David Innes** will prepare a "Fresh From Florida" menu including tuna sashimi tacos, black grouper paella and roasted Jackman Florida Waygu beef tenderloin.

Interesting relocation: **The Social Security Administration**, formerly housed in a Delray Beach strip mall near Atlantic Avenue and Military Trail, has moved to somewhat more glamorous quarters in Boca — the high-rise building that houses **GEO Group**, the international for-profit prison company. The building, incidentally, is owned by **Canpro Investments Ltd.**, a Canadian company.

GEO is catching it from another direction. A coalition of 25 advocacy groups delivered a petition with more than 10,000 signatures to the Seattle-area headquarters of the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, asking the mega-charity to end its relationship with **GEO**. A spokesman for **Gates**, which invested \$2.2 million in **GEO** in 2012, responded: "... Some of the lack of clarity in the criticism, is this understandably complex structure that we have where the foundation invests in life-saving technologies, in U.S. schools, in making sure people living with AIDS in Africa are less likely to die ... The trust invests in a lot of things to make sure we have the most money we can have to do that job."