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**SUNDAY**  
FEBRUARY 9,  
2020

THE NEWSPAPER OF FLORIDA'S FRIENDLIEST HOMETOWN

**WORLD NEWS**

## THAI GUNMAN WHO KILLED AT LEAST 21 SHOT TO DEATH IN MALL

Anger over a financial dispute led soldier in the Thai army to carry out attack, officials said.

A Defense Ministry spokesman said Sgt. Jakrapanth Thomma was behind the attack Saturday in Nakhon Ratchasima, a hub for Thailand's rural northeastern region. Much of the shooting occurred at Terminal 21 Korat, an airport-themed mall. After a 16-hour search for the gunman, police announced late Saturday that he had been fatally shot. **A11**

**NATION & WORLD REPORT**



The Associated Press

**Nation:** Titus, a 3-year-old, 120-pound bullmastiff, is returning to the ring at this week's Westminster Kennel Club show after making a remarkable recovery from a debilitating snake bite. **A12**

**World:** Afghanistan's capital is an unlikely destination for snowboarders. But a group of young Afghans hopes to put Kabul on the winter sports map and change perceptions about the war-weary country. **A19**

**INSIDE**

- Florida News A5
- Lottery A4
- Local News C1
- World News A2



**Faces in The News**  
**Robert Conrad**

Rugged, contentious actor who starred in two popular 1960s television series died Saturday at 84 of heart failure, a spokesman said.

Entertainment News, **A14**

**A DAILY SUN SPECIAL REPORT**

# Florida Rolling Out Red Carpet for Indies

Proposed bill offers rebates that could enable the state to attract filmmakers in booming independent market.



By **KRISTEN FIORE** | Daily Sun Senior Writer

Lights, camera, action — especially in Florida. Due to an increase in accessible technology, independent films are reaching an audience pool deeper than ever before. And Florida may be banking on this trend. In December, the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee unanimously approved a bill that could bring more film studios to Florida. The bill introduces a rebate program that would apply to digital media projects with production budgets of \$1.5 million or more; projects that qualified would be required to spend 70% of filming days in Florida. “I’m hoping that there will be a resurrection,” said Paul Cohen, director of the Torchlight Center and professor at the College of Motion Picture Arts at Florida State University. “Atlanta has gotten a spotlight because of the assistance they get with taxes, but I think the spotlight is trickling back down to Florida.”

Please See **FILMS, A6**



**ALSO INSIDE**

Tuning in to the Oscars tonight? Here's five things to look for from the red carpet to the stage. **A10**

Illustration by Adam Rogers, Daily Sun

**COMMUNITY & CONNECTIONS**

## Sunday Extras Inside

Grab a cup of coffee, find a comfortable seat and dive into this edition of expanded, comprehensive local coverage.



**PARADE MAGAZINE**  
A look at memorable moments from Hollywood's biggest night.



**SPORTS SPOTLIGHT**  
A national roundup of all your favorite teams. Plus news from Golf Central. **Section B**



**VILLAGES IN-DEPTH**  
A step-by-step guide to bring a life-saving AED to your neighborhood. **Section C**



**PHOTOS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS**  
Snapshots of friends and family having fun and marking milestones nearby. **Section D**



**NEW DESTINATIONS**  
Travel far and wide with Villagers and others as they explore the world. **Section E**



**ADDITIONAL SECTIONS**  
On TV this week, Jim Carrey's "Kidding" on Showtime. Plus six pages of color comics.

## LOVIN' THE LIFESTYLE

**Neighborhood Roundup**

Catch the fun from a recreation center near you. **D2**

Plus: Adopt a pet from an area shelter. **C15**

Plus: Musings from local poets. **D7**

from the front page

A DAILY SUN SPECIAL REPORT

FILMS

Continued from A1

And in a movie industry dictated by sequels and remakes, independent films are filling a gap that just keeps getting wider. “Audiences are demonstrating that they will support a well-crafted, character-driven independent film, voting with their ticket purchases at the box office,” said Margo Lange, CEO of ArtAffects Entertainment, a motion picture distribution company.

Audiences in The Villages are no exception.

More than 50% of the movies shown at Rialto Theatre, Old Mill Playhouse and Barnstorm Theater are indie movies, according to Deborah Mills, operations director at The Villages Movie Theaters.

“Most independent films that open here end up being No. 1 in the country,” added Craig Wolf, manager at Rialto Theatre. “We’ve gained a reputation. They call us up.”

And there is no shortage of independent films to choose from.



A line forms at the box office at Old Mill Playhouse in Lake Sumter Landing. More than 50% of the movies shown at Rialto Theatre, Old Mill Playhouse and Barnstorm Theater are indie movies, according to Deborah Mills, operations director at The Villages Movie Theaters.

Cindy Skop  
Daily Sun

A Shifting Dynamic

To make a film, you need people, financing, collaboration and technological support. It’s one of the most expensive art forms, Cohen said.

But expenses are decreasing. The higher accessibility and affordability of video equipment and software, coupled with the popularity of digital streaming, has become the perfect recipe for independent filmmakers and fans.

“Before, an audience or the general public was limited to what was available,” said Brendon Rogers, executive director of the Central Florida Film Festival. “If it wasn’t on TV, video or in wide release, you weren’t going to see it. Whereas now, there’s streaming.”

Services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime Video have large libraries of indie movies available for streaming, and audiences are responding to

the genre.

Because of this, the number of outlets independent films can turn to has boomed, said Christina Lane, chair of the Cinematic Arts Department at the University of Miami.

“This means there is a high demand for content, especially variety, which leaves a great opening for indie films and new cinematic approaches,” Lane said.

As Rogers sees it, Hollywood hasn’t really figured out how to adjust to the modern streaming world in which people can control how they get their content.

“There is no standard for whether an audience will want to see a movie or not,” he said. “You can take the biggest box office smash director or actor coming off of something that’s really hot, put them in something else, and it could tank. If an audience doesn’t want to see

something, they won’t.”

Hence, the volume of big-budget remakes and sequels.

Independent filmmakers have more flexibility, Rogers added.

“An indie filmmaker isn’t limited to what they think they can make money off of on the same scale as a studio that has to recoup a \$1 million, \$2 million or \$3 million budget,” he said. “The movie doesn’t have to go out and make a billion dollars to be a success and they’re not limited to the types of stories they can tell.”

Indie movies are smaller-scaled and targeted to a specific audience, as compared to a big-budget blockbuster that seeks to appeal to all four demographic quadrants, said Lange, of ArtAffects.

“Indie films are the voice of creative individuals and a more intimate form of expression to connect with their audience,”

Lange said.

Filmmaking in Florida

In 2010, The Florida Entertainment Industry Financial Incentive Program was created to encourage the use of Florida as a filming location. It offered tax credits to qualified film and media projects.

The program expired in 2016, but it did influence growth in Florida’s market for film entertainment, according to a report by the Florida Office of Film & Entertainment.

During the time the program was active, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity certified 300 productions for tax credits, expending approximately \$1.26 billion and creating an estimated 110,214 Florida jobs, according to the report.

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Continued from Previous Page

Legislature this year, the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee's proposed rebate program could help jump-start this growth.

Although Florida currently lacks tax incentives, the Sunshine State is a prime filming location.

The first reason is the geography of the state, according to Rogers, who has been making independent films for years.

"You have myriad of different types of locations that you could use for almost any film — beaches, urban areas, forests," Rogers said. "The geography gives a wide variety for the types of films that could be shot here."

The second reason is that infrastructure is already in place "from back in the heyday when Disney and Universal were in production," Rogers said. "There are a number of different types of editing houses and production resources. The state's already set up for that, which is great for filmmakers wanting to shoot here."

Florida also is packed with credible film programs at schools like Florida State University, the University of Miami and Full Sail University.

"Many of these programs encourage students to find their personal voice and focus on local stories," UM's Lane said. "This inevitably generates movies that are not cookie-cutter and serve as a launchpad for students who truly see the world from a unique standpoint."

**People Want Good Stories**

Independent films often focus on coming of age stories, true stories and niches, like the LGBTQ genre.

"Indie films offer the opportunity to create screenplays and tell stories that would not be told by big studios, either because they're deemed too small, or because they're of a nature that the studios don't want to step into," FSU's Cohen said.

They fill a niche that needs to be filled.

"We believe the movie-going public is hungry for original

stories offering quality entertainment as an alternative to the typical major studio fare of sequels and special effects-driven films," Lange said.

And on the production side of things, there is simply more artistic freedom.

"There's no one over your shoulder telling you what's acceptable and what's not acceptable," said actor John Travolta in an interview at Barnstorm Theater during the red carpet premiere of "The Fanatic," an independent film in which he starred. "You're more free to explore creative borderlines and to exceed them. You don't get that with a big studio picture, but you do get it with independent films."

It's important for available content to be diverse, because there are a lot of people who need to be served, and it is important to hear all sides of a story, said Mills, of The Villages Movie Theaters. And that's part of why so many independent films are screened and promoted here.

**The Villages Makes Independent Movies No. 1**

Indie movies largely succeed in The Villages, and Hollywood is noticing.

"There will be people who bring their film to a distributor, and the distributor will tell them, 'You need to be in The Villages,'" Mills said.

ArtAffects Entertainment is one of those distributors.

"Old Mill, Barnstorm and Rialto are predictably successful at the box office with our films and are often the top-grossing engagements in the country," said Lange, the company's CEO.

Theatrical booker Sarah Wexler said that The Villages has been a great partner for the films she works with.

"I have a sense of comfort knowing that the entire staff is also passionate about sharing the film experience with the community," she said. "The Villages Movie Theaters seem to have a loyal audience that enjoys a variety of film genres."

The Villages is making small films big, Mills said.

"We're making their indie movies blockbusters, and not just within our own community," she said. "It's rattling the industry."

# Serving the Demographic: 55-Plus Population Boosts The Indie Film Industry

By KRISTEN FIORE | Daily Sun Senior Writer

Indie movies fill a niche for audiences looking for original stories. A large portion of the audience that continuously supports independent films are people 55 and older. People age 60 and over tend to be frequent moviegoers, according to the Motion Picture Association of America, and a recent article published by The Guardian noted that this age group also is the biggest supporter of independent films. Older audiences can find the actors they know and the stories to which can they relate in independent films, said Craig Wolf, manager at Rialto Theatre.

"The movies are about life events, coming-of-age events and true stories that a lot of these people have lived through," Wolf said.

Sarah Wexler, a theatrical booker who works closely with The Villages Movie Theaters, said while people's taste in film can't really be targeted, people over 55 have been exposed to a lot of film throughout their lives and have lived through a lot of personal experiences.

"I do feel that independent films tend to be more personal and take more risks than big-budget studio films," Wexler said.

Yori Okuda, of the Village of Pennecamp, enjoys ordering indie movies through Netflix by mail and also watching them at The Villages Movie Theaters.

"I've always enjoyed small-scale movies that are thought-provoking," Okuda said. "We lived in the Washington D.C. area, and they used to have a lot of indie film festivals."

Although Okuda watches the occasional blockbuster, it's the indie movies he mainly goes to see, and luckily for him, The Villages Movie Theaters show a lot of indie movies — more than 50% of the movies screened at Rialto Theatre, Old Mill Playhouse and Barnstorm Theater are independent films, according to Deborah Wright, booking coordinator at The Villages Movie Theaters.

"I think it's wonderful," Okuda said. "I live near Lake

Sumter Landing, so I go to Old Mill Playhouse."

As an independent cinema, The Villages Movie Theaters have more flexibility when it comes to content.

"We have the freedom to have the content that we, The Villagers and our guests and our community appreciate," Mills said. "Whereas major theaters make agreements and contracts and get the big blockbuster films, because they feel like that's what will maintain

their business model."

Mills said The Villages audience is intelligent and always looking for a good story, which is why she books so many indie films.

Plus, there's just something special about going to the theater, Wexler said.

"You can sit with the people in your community and share the experience of having a story visually unfold in front of you," she said. "Maybe that is a plus to over-55 audiences to be able to have a variety of genres available. We have grown up watching films as a social outing and still want that feeling of enjoying the getaway from our daily lives."

Senior writer Kristen Fiore can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5270, or kristen.fiore@thevillagesmedia.com.



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from the front page

A DAILY SUN SPECIAL REPORT

# Independent Filmmakers Enjoy Room For Creativity

By KRISTEN FIORE | Daily Sun Senior Writer

With the right equipment and creativity, you can make an independent film just about anywhere. Brendon Rogers spent a few days co-producing a horror film in an orange grove. He also has shot in locations all over Central Florida, from downtown Sanford and Clermont to Eustis. Independent filmmakers like Rogers enjoy a flexibility that isn't possible in the making of big-budget blockbusters.

"Event cinema like 'Avengers' and 'Star Wars' can't afford to take risks," said Tim Anderson, programming coordinator for the Florida Film Festival in Maitland. "These are billion-dollar franchises that are about spectacle as much as about story. Indie filmmakers don't have as much to lose."

Rogers, executive director of the Central Florida Film Festival in Mount Dora, is also an actor, director and producer who has worked on films like "Nearly Departed," "I Love You Because," "Academy Boyz" and more. He enjoys working on independent films because they allow him to create something original and tell good stories.

"You always want an audience for your films," Rogers said. "That's why people make films. But it's having the freedom to create new things but not be bound by modern

## FLORIDA FILM FESTIVAL

This year's Florida Film Festival is April 17-26 at Enzian Theater in Maitland. Tickets can be purchased online at [floridafilmmfestival.com](http://floridafilmmfestival.com).

Hollywood conventions, remakes and stories audiences have seen before because they won't take risks."

The making of independent films also helps students and beginners gain valuable experience.

Nina May, an independent filmmaker with Renaissance Women Productions, said she is always looking for undiscovered talent.

"You have professionals on set, but also film students



Submitted photos

A camera crew works on set of Nina May's romantic comedy and independent film "First Lady," coming to select theaters Friday.



A camera focuses in on a scene in "First Lady."

who are learning on-the-job training and in front and behind the camera," May said. "It gives kids an opportunity to provide their skills in a real-life production and jump start their career."

Paul Cohen, director of the Torchlight Center and professor at the College of Motion Picture Art at Florida State University, has executive-produced films like "Life and Nothing More," shot completely in North Florida, and "Good Fortune," a documentary about John Paul DeJoria.

"I enjoy working with individuals whose voices are unique but clear," he said. "They have a passion for the subject and the art of cinema. Their passion often comes without a tremendous sense of how they'll finance the film or ultimately offer the film to distributors."

Those who work on

independent films have more leeway to focus on the story, Anderson said.

"The sky is the limit if you can afford to see your vision come to light," he said.

And with increasing affordability and accessibility of equipment, making independent films has become easier than ever.

"Cameras are cheaper or can be rented," May said. "It's really leveled the playing field for independent movies. It's a game-changer out there, and all you need to fill that gap is creativity and talent."

Rogers said for many filmmakers he knows, the equivalent of having a movie in theaters is to go on a festival tour.

"If they have a movie that makes it into 30 different film festivals, that's their wide release," he said.

Rogers said at the Central Florida Film Festival, short films and movies in the comedy and horror genres are most popular.

"You don't know what to expect, and that's fun," he said. "In so many major Hollywood films, you kind of know what the outcome is going to be. But indie movies let audiences discover something for the first time."

Anderson said the Florida Film Festival aims to push boundaries and highlight diverse voices in cinema.

"The team that chooses the films review over 1,300 hours of film to choose the lineup, and we believe it represents the very best of what is being produced outside of Hollywood today," he said. "Without independent cinema, the landscape and your local multiplex would just be so much less interesting. Take a chance. Come see a film. You won't regret it."

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from the front page

A DAILY SUN SPECIAL REPORT

# Theaters in Villages Bring Interactive Events to Films

By KRISTEN FIORE | Daily Sun Senior Writer

Seeing a movie in The Villages isn't just seeing a movie. It's meeting the filmmakers and getting behind-the-scenes insight from the actors. It's a surprise red-carpet event featuring A-listers like John Travolta. As Villages Movie Theaters Operations Director Deborah Mills likes to say, "If we can dream it, we can do it." Independent films are showcased beyond the screen at The Villages Movie Theaters, which constantly offer interactive events alongside featured films. Actors, directors and filmmakers visit the theaters to hold Q&A events and more.

These promotional opportunities benefit the independent films screened at The Villages Movie Theaters, according to Margo Lange, CEO of ArtAffects Entertainment, a motion picture distribution company.

"It really makes a difference in reaching our widest audience," Lange said.

In September 2018, a group of puppies came to Rialto Theatre to promote the documentary "Pick of the Litter." That same month, a red-carpet premiere of "The Healer" was held at Barnstorm Theater to raise funds for Camp Boggy Creek, a camp for seriously ill children and their families.

In February 2019, WWE Hall of Famer Dory Funk Jr. brought a live wrestling ring to Barnstorm Theater to benefit multiple charities alongside a screening of "Fighting with My Family."

In August of last year, actor John Travolta, who lives in Ocala, held a red-carpet premiere of his independent film "The Fanatic" at Barnstorm Theater.

"It brings Hollywood to Florida," Travolta said in an interview during the event. "There's no reason why we can't celebrate film anywhere, and these are people who care very much about me, and I care about them and want them to have that experience of a night out."

In September, a packed double-screening of the "Downton Abbey" movie was held at Old Mill Playhouse along with a tea party, live music, trivia and prizes, and in November, the venue held its first military film festival, which ran for four days, showcased Hollywood actors and directors and screened a number of military-themed films, including an exclusive, early premiere of the historical drama "Midway."

"I think Villagers love when we bring the directors, writers and producers here, because then they can be part of the excitement of the movie," Mills said.

Many of the event ideas come from Rialto Theatre manager Craig Wolf, whose goal is to



Michael Johnson | Daily Sun

John Travolta takes a selfie with Trista Mudd, of Ocala, before a special screening of "The Fanatic" at Barnstorm Theater.



Max Gersh | Daily Sun

Pat "Pattie Hattie" Reilly helps Kendall Lewis make a balloon bracelet during a fundraiser at Barnstorm Theater.



Michael Johnson | Daily Sun

WWE Hall of Famer Jerry "The King" Lawler, center, participates in a special charity wrestling event in February 2019 at Barnstorm Theater in Brownwood.

"We want to engage the community and let them know that we're the place to be."

**DEBORAH MILLS**  
Villages Movie Theaters  
Operations Director

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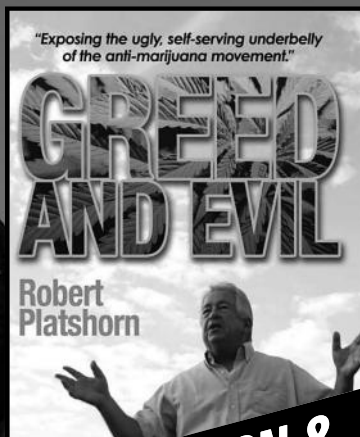
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**WILDWOOD REC CENTER Thursday, February 13, 5:30pm**  
PRESENTED BY THE HEALTHY WEALTHY AND WISE CLUB

# LEARN FROM DOCTORS AND REAL PATIENTS!





Featuring Author & Activist **Robert Platshorn**



"Exposing the ugly, self-serving underbelly of the anti-marijuana movement!"

Robert Platshorn

**FREE ADMISSION & FREE BUFFET**

courtesy of  

**FREE TRULIEVE GIFT BAG**

**DISCOUNT** Medical Recommendation

# THE SILVER TOUR

Teaching Seniors the Benefits of Medical Marijuana.

**Presenting the benefits of MEDICAL MARIJUANA:**

- Special segment on Major Medical Advances
- Preventing and treating **Alzheimers** with cannabis
- Treating **Cancers** with cannabis
- Treating Crohn's, Epilepsy, Sleep and Chronic Pain
- Doctor/Nurse will be present to answer questions
- Doctors can help obtain Florida Medical Card

**LIMITED SEATS** **COME EARLY!**  
Info & Reservations **Mary 352-325-1554** or **msoares1@centurylink.net**