

Competition to mark Film Commission milestone



Moab to Monument Valley Film Commission Director Bega Metzner and her team are sponsoring a short film competition to mark the 70th anniversary of the commission's founding. *Courtesy photo*

By **Doug McMurdo**

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It's been 70 years since the founding of the Moab to Monument Valley Film Commission—the longest-running film commission in the world—and Director Bega Metzner and her team have come up with a great plan to celebrate the milestone.

The Moab Showdown 49-Hour Short Film Competition gets underway Nov. 7-10 and teams can register in September. The competition is a tie-in with the year of the commission's start—1949. "The competitors will be making a movie from scratch within 49 hours," said Metzner. It all starts with teams pulling genres out of a hat. "They can start by writing a script—or not," said Metzner. "They can run and gun if they want."

Teams can consist of one person to "as many as they would like," including bringing in a writer, director, crew and sound people, for instance. The only hard and fast rule is that a completely cut and edited film with sound is turned in within the allotted 49 hours. A panel of judges from various locales will determine the winners, who will be in line for a prize. "We're hoping for cash prizes," said Metzner, before adding with a smile, "It depends on how well my fundraising goes."

On the subject of fundraising, Metzner is looking for donations from the business community and she needs volunteers ahead of and during the time the competition is held.

Metzner said she wants locals to get involved with the effort, including high school students, and there are plans to provide a filmmaking education camp at the middle school and allow students there to make a two-minute film that will be showcased.

The films made for the competition can be as short as two minutes, but can be no longer than eight minutes, she said. "This is the first time I've ever put on anything like this," said Metzner. "It should be really hard, really crazy and so much fun. That's what I'm hoping for."

While the competitors will have much to do in 49 hours, they won't have to worry about locations or permits. Metzner is working in tandem with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S.

Forest Service and other federal and state land agencies so predetermined locations can be permitted in advance. Filming on private property also will occur.

She said the event begins at noon on Nov. 7 with a meeting with competitors to make sure permits are in order and to give each of them the same line of dialogue that must be included in the film, as well as a prop.

"We already have interest from California high school students who are coming here rather than enter a New York contest," said Metzner, who is looking for a "minimum" of 10 competitors. She's also looking for volunteers for Nov. 7-10 to fill a number of roles in front of and behind the camera, such as "standby talent."

"It's a really cool event for the community to be involved with, literally, the longest-running film commission in the world," she said.

Those interested in competing should go to www.filmmoab.com/moabshowdown. Those interested in volunteering or donation should email filmmoab@moabcity.org or call [435-259-4341](tel:435-259-4341). Judges will review the films and a mixer will be held Nov. 10 celebrating the competition and its participants.

In other Film Commission news

Metzner said the heat of the Moab summer did not slow down the filming of commercials and other projects. In addition to the now-being-edited "The Canyonlands" horror movie that wrapped up filming earlier this year, Metzner said actor Mark Wahlberg finished one day's filming in the area for "Good Joe Bell," a film made from the book of the same title written by famed novelist Larry McMurtry and co-written by Diana Ossana.

Metzner as part of doing business often signs nondisclosure agreements, so she isn't always free to explain all that goes on, but she was able to reveal that the makers of a French luxury brand filmed a big commercial in the area, as did a national carmaker. The BBC filmed the finale of a British television show titled "Animal Impossible."

While the productions aren't epic Hollywood blockbusters, they do help out the local economy. "It's been a very hot summer, a time of year we don't usually see back-to-back projects," she said. "This keeps a lot of locals working," she said, "whether it's providing lodging accommodations—one commercial brought in a crew of 100 and another brought 75—and they're here for five, seven and even ten days at a time and they're eating in restaurants, sleeping here, buying gas here and even using local craft services."

"Alaska is a Drag" kicks off Pride Week with a free screening from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Sept. 26 at Star Hall. This "fish out of water story" is about a cannery worker in Alaska who has dreams of being a drag superstar – who also is a promising boxer. This is in collaboration with NFMLA and features a Utah filmmaker.

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