



**2025 Festival Wrap-Up
September 20, 2025**

Dear Filmmakers, Sponsors, Audience, Panelists, Journalists, Staff, and Everyone involved with VFF2:

We thank you for everything you did to make the Vacationland Film Festival a wonderful experience for everyone. We look forward to seeing you again next year.

This Year's Awards



Cash, Nick, and Dad at Q&A Opening Night. Photo by Wendy Brown.



A Cassidy Brothers Production

A fun, sweet, relatable film made by two brothers on a road trip from Maine to California, Nick and Cash brought their film, the blue bus, and many followers, to Vacationland. Thanks guys. We love your energy and your filmmaking!



This category highlights films that envision a better world and promote dialogue. We recognize those seeking creative and productive solutions to the major problems we face as a civilization, in big ways and small.

The documentary ***Artfully United***, Directed by **David Benner** and Produced by **Chris Walters** and **Phiphen**, follows the artist Mike Norice as he creates a series of inspirational murals in underserved neighborhoods in and around Los Angeles through his non-profit organization, Artfully United.

Artfully United's mission: to uplift the psyche of people in our cities and communities that suffer from high rates of poverty and violence. Through painting murals with positive messages in these high risk areas, we aim to lower gang violence, graffiti, drug abuse and crime. By involving community members in the construction of these murals, this activity will not only provide an outlet through art, but also restore pride, unite communities and positively impact the psychological well-being of the people.

CITY THEATER AUDIENCE AWARDS

This award reflects the audience response to films as observed by in-theater festival staff.

FEATURE FILM



In addition to the filmmaking team, it was an honor to meet Mike Norice. The inspiring story about his life and his work drew an enthusiastic crowd who had a very positive response to the film.



David Benner, Michael Norice, and Chris Walters. Photo by Phiphen

SHORT FILM



Calla Burman and Zuri Wemple in "Sentinels."



Directed by Matthew Luhrman, and featuring a cast of young local actors, *Sentinels* was a crowd favorite. Filmed during the pandemic, this imaginative and fast-moving short film celebrates the power of imagination.

YOUTH FILMMAKING

This year's Youth Award goes posthumously to Willem Holden Watkinson, who died in December 2024, for his film *April in Maine*. With permission from his family, we will in the future call the Youth Award "Will's Prize" and award it to the winner of the Youth (18-and-under) Category.



In honor of Will, this award will in the future be called Will's Prize and awarded each year to a Youth Filmmaker (18 and under).

SPECIAL MENTIONS

ANIMATION – Produced, Directed, and Animated by Irene Kim-Ahiska, *This Half Light* was written by Maine resident Kerem Durdag based on a dream that had its roots in his experience as an immigrant, and a reminder of what matters: love, grace, and desire to engage in beauty in the midst of life's challenges.



COMMUNITY – With all that is happening in the world, we wanted to have a festival in which stories about Community are celebrated. Many thanks to Director Tom Bell for bringing us *An Extraordinary Place*, about volunteer-run radio station WMPG, which showcases the best of us.

OUTDOOR MAINE – There were so many wonderful Maine films to choose from this year, but one that really stands out as quintessentially Maine is Director Carl Smith's *Whisper*. Thank you, Carl, for taking us on a sailing adventure with you.



PRODUCTION – The award-winning film *Kitchen Tales*, was not just a wonderful story about the life of an immigrant family over 40 years, it was also masterfully produced. Directed by Jane Moriarty, Maine's own Kerem Durdag was Executive Producer.

Q&A Directors Michael Venn and Marc Dole were both present for Q&A and shared their experiences of making *In Danger of Being Discovered*, as well as some lovely stories about members of the bands in the film, then and now.



They also shared some information about the "behind the scenes" stuff that happened during the filming, when they were in between takes and/or when the interviewees weren't aware that the cameras were still rolling. There were some beautiful moments in the film, but also, some great stories that weren't included in the film itself.



STUDENT WORK – *the 15th Annual Maine Mayhem* was once again a wonderful overview of the fine work by the students at SMCC Communications & New Media Studies program. We at Vacationland Film Festival are enthusiastic supporters of the Maine filmmakers of tomorrow. Well done, everyone.



Welcome back to Vacationland!

August 21, 2025

Biddeford, Maine – welcome to the **Vacationland Film Festival** -- **August 21-24, 2025** at the **City Theater in Biddeford, Maine.**

The **Vacationland Film Festival** welcomes filmmakers and film lovers to the beautiful City Theater and Lincoln Hotel. Please peruse this Program Guide and plan your film viewing. Have a great festival!



The City Theater, 205 Main Street



The Lincoln Hotel, 17 Lincoln Street

From August 21-24, the **City Theater** will be transformed into a movie theater. Salon-style after-film conversations can take place at the beautiful **Lincoln Hotel**, about 100 yards from the theater. Festival attendees are encouraged to visit the Lincoln at any time of day and enjoy its spacious, well-appointed Lobby and groovy downstairs Lounge area, morning coffee and breakfast treats from Spinning Jenny's, after-five drinks at the Lobby Bar, and starting at noon, delicious meals and drinks at Batson River Brewing & Distilling, just downstairs from the Main Lobby and adjacent to the downstairs Lounge.

Downtown Biddeford can be accessed via Route 95 or the Amtrak Downeaster from Boston that arrives at Saco Station, with a .7 mile walk up Main Street to the City Theater. The Portland Jetport is 15 miles away.

Please be aware that there is major road construction happening in Biddeford this summer - allow yourself plenty of time to move around!

CHILDISH THINGS

A Cassidy Brothers Production

Directed and Produced by Nick and Cash Cassidy

Run time: 95 minutes

Nick is a 30-year-old musician who is not quite sure what he wants to do when he grows up, but his long-time girlfriend has her own set of plans for them.

Nick decides to sell his bright blue party bus to a buyer in California, so he and his brother embark on a cross-country journey from Maine to LA to see America and have their last hurrah before Nick settles down.



With cameras and mics along for the ride, and a soundtrack (and appearance by) Fairhazel, the brothers encounter real people along the way, while creating a relatable coming-of-age, semi-fictional and fully-improvised mockumentary on the road. (2025)



Opening Night – Thursday, August 21 at 7 pm



Friday, August 22

**Friday, August 22, at 3:00 pm
FRIENDS, LOVERS, AND
EXPECTATIONS**



Expectations of Naïve Lovers

Director Chad Ackerson

A young couple navigates love, comfort, and uncertainty in coastal Maine. As dinner dates sour and dreams of leaving clash with fears of change, they question what it means to hold on or let go. *Expectations of Naïve Lovers* is an intimate, honest portrait of relationships in transition. (2023)

Run time: 16 minutes

These three short films feature characters who are in the throes of learning about themselves, their friends, and their futures.

Let It Go, Written, Directed and Edited by Thomas Hall and Finn Zuccarini (2025)

Shot on and around Bowdoin College's campus in February 2025 with the help of students and professors, this film is a relatable story about how we get by with a little help from our friends.

Run time: 18 minutes



Suitcases

Director Cody Alexander Curtis

Thomas and Lilian, a couple once fully devoted to each other, find themselves separated and in situations where they can be unfaithful. Their love shakes, their bonds break, and their relationship shatters. With one last fateful meeting in the place they once called home, they will decide whether to move past their mistakes or say goodbye to each other forever. (2024)

Run time: 25 Minutes

Total Program Run Time: 60 minutes Q&A Follows.



Friday, August 22, 5:00 pm



Directors Marc Dole and Michael Venn

Run time: 59 minutes

With band members and Director for Q&A – followed by merrymaking at the Lincoln

IN DANGER OF BEING DISCOVERED

If you were around for the 90’s Portsmouth music scene, or even if you weren’t, this delightful documentary will introduce you to some of the hottest bands from the area who had a brush with fame, and in the end, realized that maybe the real gift was playing music and being together in such a magical place and time. (2013)



Friday, August 22, 6:30 pm

FRIDAY NIGHT FRIGHT

Warning: these films contain blood and violent scenes. Viewer discretion is advised.



In *The Stranger in the Snow*, Directed by VFF1 Audience Award-winning Director Mark J. Parker, a couple on their third date look forward to a quiet night at home, until..... Filmed in Bangor. (2025)
Run time: 12 Minutes >

The Friday evening show contains three stories:

<*Red*, a short film by Writer/Director Meredith Tokac, centers around a group of friends cheerfully meeting for dinner until mistrust and betrayal lead to action. (2024)

Run time: 11 minutes



<*Duplicitous*, Directed and Produced by Quinn Wheatley After the loss of a loved one, a young man finds himself in the wake of a blood-thirsty, cosmic entity that inhabits the woods in this psychological horror film about the cycle of life. (2025)
Run time: 95 Minutes



Total Program Run time: 128 minutes, Followed by Q&A

Saturday, August 23

Saturday, August 23, 11:00 am

YOUTH FILMS (18+UNDER)

April In Maine is a posthumous submission directed, filmed, and edited in 2023 by the late Willem Holden Watkinson, 6/22/2005 - 11/7/2024, of Kennebunk, Maine. It is a short, gentle, peaceful yet powerful piece captured on a vintage Canon 3CCD GL1. (2023)

Run time: 2 Minutes

Family and friends will be in attendance.



Stolen Springs, Directed by New York City high school student, Maine camp attendee, and now rising NYU student Houston Diaz, is a documentary about Poland Springs and the free rider problem—how companies exploit public resources for profit, while leaving society to deal with the consequences. (2024)

Director is starting school in New York today and will be missed. Good luck, Houston!

Run time: 35 minutes



Saturday, August 23, 1:00 pm

GRIEF TAKES MANY FORMS

In this series of four short films, our filmmakers look at the challenges surrounding illness, loss, and regret.

Lament, Directed by Robbie Moore

Language Warning: F-bomb at around 9:15

70-year-old Walter still struggles to cope with the death of his wife, Susan. On the 5th anniversary of her death, strange occurrences begin to happen in his household, forcing him to face the past. (2024)

Run time: 15 minutes



Saturday August 23, 1:00pm - continued

Invisible, Directed by Ryan Nunes

As she deals with the crushing weight of living with her chronic illness, Riley begins to reach her breaking point. (2024)

For more resources on Chronic Illness and other invisible diseases please check out the Center For Chronic Illness:

<https://www.thecenterforchronicillness.org/>

Run time: 10 minutes



Cascades, Directed by Brian Russell (VFF1)

A couple walks towards a crossroads on the day of their 30th wedding anniversary. Marcus and Denise have been happily married for 30 years. Well, almost happily married. Can they overcome the one thing that just might tear them apart? (2024) Run time: 14 minutes



Sentinels, Written and Directed by Matthew Luhrman

When dad (played by Ian Carlsen, VFF1) gets sick, the kids have a plan.

Made in Maine, *Sentinels* features performances from over a dozen local child actors and celebrates the power of imagination. (2023)

Run time: 15 minutes



Total Program Run Time: 54 minutes, Followed by Q&A

Saturday, August 23, 3:00 pm

WHERE DO WE FIT IN ?



This series of short films examine the immigrant experience and ultimate sense of belonging.

This Half Light, Produced, Directed, and Animated by Irene Kim-Ahiska and written by Maine resident Kerem Durdag. It was based on a dream that had its roots in his experience as an immigrant. It's a manifestation of what matters: love, grace and desire to engage in beauty in the midst of life's challenges. (2024)

Run time: 7 minutes

This video contains depictions of violence, death, and war. Viewer discretion is advised.

Kitchen Tales, Directed by Jane Moriarty

A newlywed Indian couple arrive in London, 1979, and attempt to make a home out of their new lives. As they navigate 40 years of marriage through the food they make and the meals they share, their family grows but their love struggles to survive.

A creatively ambitious short film from exciting new voices in filmmaking. Inspired by the tender love story at the heart of this film, a diverse team of women from across the globe came together for this film. (2021) Run time: 22 Minutes

Total Program Run Time: 30 minutes, followed by Q&A

Saturday, August 23, 5:00 pm
MAINE ARTS, MEDIA, AND CULTURE



This award-winning film is currently part of the permanent collection of the British Film Institute.

This series of short documentaries explores the intersection of arts, media & culture in Maine.

Sanctuary in the Pines, Directed by Slade Moore

This short doc follows the DJs of WBOR at Bowdoin College and their deeply loved, seriously offbeat studio space, *Dudley Coe*. Faced with the imminent demolition of Dudley—the place that inspired and empowered WBOR's DJs for 30 years—they wrestle with feelings of loss and dig deep for resilience. (2025) Run time: 23 minutes

Saturday, August 23, 5:00pm, continued

Final First Edition, Directed by Wes Sterrs

Rich Horn has spent his entire life collecting Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles comic books and meticulously archiving them in his Littleton, Colorado basement. When he uncovers a once-in-a-lifetime piece of memorabilia, it ignites a cross-country mission: Reprint the very first edition TMNT comic in Maine using the exact same techniques and materials it was printed on in 1984. With a style that playfully references the cinematic turns of 1970s conspiracy dramas and political thrillers, *Final First Edition* documents Rich's quest to make his name in the beloved history of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (2025) Run time: 10 minutes



An Extraordinary Place, Directed by Tom Bell

In an age of algorithm-driven streaming, music is everywhere—yet listeners feel disconnected. *An Extraordinary Place* is a documentary by Tom Bell exploring the enduring appeal of WMPG, a community radio station powered by people deeply passionate about music and community. (2024)

Run time: 35 minutes

Salt Marsh, Directed by Tom Bell

This short film documents Mitchell Rasor's winter salt marsh drawings. Shot in a Yarmouth nature preserve along the Royal River, with a score by Lee Ranaldo, the film explores art, climate, and solitude through Rasor's reflections, archival footage, and evocative landscapes. A poetic portrait of an artist and place. (2025)

Run time: 15 Minutes



Total Program Run Time: 83 minutes, Q&A Follows

Saturday, August 23, 7:00 pm

ARTFULLY UNITED

(2025) Run Time: 95 Minutes

+ Reception at The Lincoln after the film



Directed by Dave Benner and Produced by Chris Walters and Phippen (Producer's Award VFF1), all Mainers.

This documentary introduces us to Michael Norice -- artist, community builder, son, father, husband, brother, and role model.

Surrounded by a loving family and community, Norice paints murals that cover up graffiti and bring hope to broken communities.

Norice was born in Watts. During the early to late 80s, Michael and his family endured poverty and homelessness while being surrounded by drugs and gang violence.

Although difficult, Michael used those

troubling times as a springboard for what he would accomplish and who he would become.

Michael has now been creating art for over thirty years. Although naturally gifted in drawing and painting, his drive for excellence led him to seek extensive professional training in graphic design as well as painting techniques including realism and oils.

Michael began speaking at schools in inner city communities about the importance of education and career building. He has received numerous awards for his art from the City of Los Angeles and is the first African-American to paint a mural in the city of Carson.

Multiple Mike Norice murals can be found throughout the City of Los Angeles and surrounding communities. In addition to commissioned installations, Michael started the non-profit Artfully United in 2017, offering murals in otherwise disadvantaged areas to initiate a positive vibe.

Artfully United *Uniting Our Communities Through Art*

Our mission is to uplift the psyche of people in our cities and communities that suffer from high rates of poverty and violence. Through painting murals with positive messages in these high risk areas, we aim to lower gang violence, graffiti, drug abuse and crime. By involving community members in the construction of these murals, this activity will not only provide an outlet through art, but also restore pride, unite communities and positively impact the psychological well-being of the people



Sunday, August 24

MAINE MAYHEM

Sunday, August 24 starts at **11:00am** with an Encore Presentation of the 15th Annual Southern Maine Community College *Maine Mayhem* (2025), showcasing the excellent training that film students are receiving in SMCCs two-year Communications and New Media Studies Program. Various Directors.

More details here: <https://www.smccme.edu/maine-mayhem/>

Run time: 144 minutes

Q&A Follows.



Sunday, August 24 at 2:00 pm

This series of four short documentaries takes a look at the people, places, and activities that make Maine so special.

Sine Cera

Directed by Jeshua Soucy (VFF1)

This short documentary introduces us to the folks at Kennebec Framing, who use traditional building methods to create beautiful, strong, enduring structures. (2025)

Run Time: 10 Minutes



OUR BEAUTIFUL MAINE



Broken: A LifeFlight Story, Directed by Mark Fleming

After a devastating accident in February 2023, Roger Quehl's life was upended in an instant. This 9-minute documentary follows his journey from trauma to recovery, capturing the quiet strength and resilience that carried him forward. Set against the backdrop of rural emergency care, Roger's story offers an intimate look at the human cost of crisis—and the extraordinary efforts that often unfold behind the scenes. It's a portrait of vulnerability, survival, and the enduring impact of one life touched by swift, decisive action. (2024) Run time: 9 minutes

Sunday, August 24 at 2:00 pm, continued

Whisper – A Sailing Adventure, Directed by Carl Smith

Whisper is a three-part short story following the adventures aboard a sailboat in Downeast Maine.

“It ties together the past and present, my lifelong adventure of sailing the coast of Maine aboard *Whisper*, our family's Allied Seabreeze 35, while also showcasing Maine in a way that many people do not see.” Carl Smith This film is a beautiful tribute to Coastal Maine. (2025) Run time: 14 minutes



Tending the Tides: Maine’s Aquaculture Apprenticeships

Director Trixie Betz

Maine is home to the nation’s first-ever registered Aquaculture Apprenticeship, a one-of-a-kind program that has attracted applicants locally and nationally. The apprenticeship blends 2,000 hours of practical on-the-water experience and 144 hours of technical training, creating opportunities for young people to establish fulfilling careers in aquaculture while supporting Maine’s working waterfronts. "Tending the Tides: Maine's Aquaculture Apprenticeship" is a short documentary about the apprentices taking part in this program, many of whom relocated to Maine from as far away as California to begin the program. Others were born in Maine and spent their whole lives here, some coming from the commercial fisheries and wanting to diversify their careers and income. (2025)

Run Time: 28 Minutes

Followed by Q&A

Total Program Run Time: 60 minutes, Followed by Q&A

Sunday, August 24 at 4:00 pm
PANEL DISCUSSION: FILMMAKING IN MAINE



The Maine Film Association, in partnership with the Vacationland Film Festival, are pleased to present a panel discussion about the present and future of filmmaking in Maine.

Free admission, but seating is limited so please reserve your seat at citytheater.org/tickets

The Who, What, and Why of Filmmaking in Maine

We'll discuss the state of filmmaking in Maine and the ways we can all work together to strengthen the industry.

Panelists:

Nick & Cash Cassidy, Director & Producer, *Childish Things*

Steve Lyons, Director, Maine Film Office

Kate Sibole, Chair, Communications and New Media Studies, Southern Maine Community College (SMCC)

Mike Stuttmann, Director, Vacationland Animation

Chris Walters, Producer, *Artfully United*

Moderator:

Kendall Harnett, Filmmaker and Faculty Member at SMCC
Board Member, Maine Film Association



After the panel discussion, we'll head to The Lincoln for informal conversation and networking. If you are a filmmaker, a film student, or even just filmmaking-curious, you will **not** want to miss this event.

Tickets and passes are available through the City Theater web site citytheater.org/tickets

More information about the festival can be found at vacationlandfilmfestival.com or citytheater.org/vacationland-film-festival/ Or contact us by email vacationlandfilmfestival@gmail.com or vacationland@citytheater.org

The Vacationland Film Festival is a production of the City Theater



The City Theater is located at 205 Main Street in Biddeford, Maine. It originally opened as an Opera House in 1860 and was rebuilt after a fire in 1896. The City Theater spent the 1930s through the 1950s as a movie house, and now hosts live theatrical and musical performances and films and is run by City Theater Associates, a 501 c 3 non-profit arts organization committed to promoting the arts in Southern Maine.

SPECIAL THANKS TO



CITY THEATER · BIDDEFORD, MAINE
VacationlandFilmFestival.com · TICKETS: citytheater.org/tickets



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Proud to serve the
Vacationland
Film Festival!

SALES INQUIRIES WELCOME

"Rocks at Cape Elizabeth" – oil on canvas ©2021
"Winter in Falmouth" – oil on panel ©2025

The Vacationland Film Festival logo, branding, and poster were designed by John Gummere.

Our web site vacationlandfilmfestival.com was designed and is maintained by our friends at



Many sincere thanks to the team at The Lincoln Hotel who give us a fabulous venue in which to entertain festival guests.



Thank you, friends!



**VACATIONLAND
FILM FESTIVAL**

FALL FILM CHALLENGE

Write.

Shoot.

Edit.

Inspire.

**Creating: September 18–21 | Judging: September 24–30 |
Public Screening: October 9th**

Fast. Fearless. Filmmaking... Be bold. Be brilliant. Be done in 72 hours.

What?

The 72-Hour Maine Film Challenge dares teams of creatives to conceive, film, and finish a short movie in just three days. From students to seasoned pros, filmmakers across the state come together to turn pressure into passion—and create cinematic magic.

How It Works

- **Kickoff Prompt:** Teams receive a theme, prop, and line of dialogue on **Thursday September 18 at 6PM at [Brickyard Hollow in Portland \(9 Commercial\)](#)**
- **72 Hours:** You'll have just 3 days to write, film, and edit a short (3-5 minutes TRT).
- **Submit:** Final films are due by **11:59 on September 21.**
- **Judging & Awards:** A panel of industry experts will judge submissions from **September 24–30.**
- **Premiere Event:** All the entries will screen for the public at the Nickelodeon on **October 9th.** With the winners being announced at that time!

Why?

- Test your storytelling skills under real-world pressure.
- Compete for **love, adoration, goofy prizes and absolute bragging rights!**
- Gain exposure through screening, press, and social media.
- Network with fellow filmmakers and creatives across Maine.
- Celebrate your work with a live audience!

Who Can Enter?

All storytellers in Maine!
Open to students, indie filmmakers, hobbyists, pros.
All genres welcome. No entry fee for youth teams.
Registration opens **August 15** at: [Register Here!](#)

Questions?

info@mainefilm.org or www.mainefilm.org

Instagram: @MaineFilm

Facebook: #MaineFilmInfo

