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Student Short Film Festival Accepting Entries Through March 4



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By Brendan J. O'Reilly

Westhampton filmmaker Sydney Sheren, a 15-year-old Westhampton Beach High School sophomore, is hosting a short film festival this spring and is asking local sixth- through 12-graders to submit their original movies.

Titled "Short Films, Long Lasting Effects," the festival is designed to spur interest in filmmaking among youth while also raising money for One Laptop per Child, a nonprofit that provides computers to children in developing countries.

"The money that we donate to charity will change somebody's life forever," Sydney said.

The festival is an outgrowth of a summer program Sydney attended at Brown University. It was a leadership in global engagement class, in which she was challenged to come up with an idea she could bring back to her own community. She decided to combine her love of filmmaking with her love of technology, and to finally put on a film festival, as she long dreamed of. "It's something I always wanted to do," she said. "So I decided, why not now?"

Sydney has been making films since she was in fourth grade at Westhampton Beach Elementary School. Her teacher at the time, Jamie Thom, taught her how to edit films using iMovie on a school-provided MacBook. Sydney had her first public screening when she was a sixth-grader. At the Hampton Arts Cinema in Westhampton Beach, she showed "The Games of Hunger," a short adaptation of the young adult novel "The Hunger Games." The screening benefited St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the nationally renowned pediatric hospital in Tennessee.

Sydney went on to attend a preteen summer program and a digital filmmaking program at New York Film Academy in Manhattan, and she now uses more advanced editing software, such as

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She is a technology advocate and has been a presenter at the Suffolk ASSET Conference, which promotes enhancing teaching and learning through computers and other educational technology in Suffolk County schools, and the Student Technology Conference, a student-run, global, online initiative.

The Short Films, Long Lasting Effects festival will accept films between five and eight minutes long. Students from any middle or high school may enter, though they must be in attendance at the festival.

The event is open to the public. "It will be free to come, but we're asking for voluntary donations at the door," Sydney said.

A panel of judges, including Naomi Hogarty of 91 East Productions in Westhampton Beach and local actress Rosemary Cline, will award first-, second- and third-place trophies. There will be a fan favorite winner as well, decided by which film can garner the most donations for One Laptop per Child after all of the shorts have been screened.

Sydney is planning to make a film for the festival herself—possibly a horror movie parody—but it will not be put into consideration for an award. In all, the festival program will include about 10 films, depending on the length of the top submissions.

Film submissions will be accepted through March 4. The festival will take place at the Westhampton Beach High School auditorium on Friday, April 15, at 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit shortfilmslonglast.wix.com/filmfestival/.



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