

Disability Issues 

Film festival celebrates lives of the disabled

Sunday, April 22, 2012

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April 22, 2012 (OAK PARK, Ill.) (WLS) -- For the first time in the Chicago area, there will be a film festival celebrating the lives of people with disabilities. It starts this week.

The Reel Abilities Chicago Film Festival begins this Wednesday with several activities. It includes films, panel discussions, live music performances and an art gallery featuring local artists with developmental disabilities.

This five-day festival is a collaboration between four community agencies serving people with disabilities and Oak Park Township Mental Health Board.

"One of the things that becomes apparent from the results of the needs assessment is that there was quite a bit of stigma that still existed in our community around people with disabilities," said Lisa DeVivo, executive director of the mental health board. "We came across the New York Reel Abilities Film Festival and made a couple of phone calls. They were actually looking for a Chicago venue. There are 19 other cities doing this beside us."

Jim Haptonstahl is the chair of the festival. He is from Seguin Services

"There will be five films; one of which is a full length drama. That film is called "Snow Cake," starring Sigourney Weaver, Alan Rickman and Carrie Ann Moss about a person with Autism," Haptonstahl said.

Four documentaries will focus on a variety of disabilities, including Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, mental illness and physical disabilities.

The Chris Burke Band will also perform on April 28. Burk is an actor who appeared in ABC's "Life Goes On."

In addition, artwork created by local artist will be part of the event.

All events will take place in Oak Park at several locations.

"We want to follow the festival themes, celebrate the lives of people with disabilities, we want people who attend who view the films to come out of the theatre saying I can celebrate the real disabilities of the people being featured," Haptonstahl said. "And people with mental illness, people with developmental disabilities are productive citizens. They're just like you and I."

The festival is from April 25-29. General admission is \$10 and \$7 for students. For more information about the schedule, locations and events, visit www.chicago.reelabilities.org

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