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REELAbilities Boston examines the lives of people with disabilities

February 02, 2012 | By Nancy Shohet West

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As communications and marketing manager of the Boston Jewish Film Festival, Jeff Remz is accustomed to thinking about what matters to the Jewish community. But the films on people with disabilities that his organization is screening beginning tonight are important, as Remz said, “to the entire film-going public.

“Disabilities don’t know boundaries by way of country, ethnicity, religion, or community.” said Remz. “Yes, we are the Jewish Film Festival, but we believe that REELAbilities gives us a chance to expand awareness of disabilities.”

It is a dramatic departure for the BJFF, since only one of the six films included in Boston’s REELAbilities festival has a Jewish theme. Remz has already seen all six films himself, and is hard-pressed to name his favorite.



A scene from Anita, a REELAbilities film from Argentina that is being screened... (Boston Jewish Film Festival)

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All of them, he said, “introduced me to a class of people who are striving to succeed and want to express themselves.”

One that particularly caught his attention was “Shooting Beauty,” a documentary made in Watertown by a photographer who works with a woman who has cerebral palsy, and fashioned a camera that people with this disability can use “to show through film how they are seeing life,” as Remz put it. Another favorite is “Warrior Champions,” which tells the story of Iraqi war veterans, now amputees, as they were training and competing to qualify for the 2008

Paralympic Games in Beijing.

“I’m interested in sports anyway, but to see these people who have suffered a tremendous amount while representing their country in battle, and are now taking a great deal of pride in representing the US in a totally different way” is unforgettable, Remz said.

The festival begins with “My Spectacular Theater,” a Chinese film about a young man who finds refuge in a Beijing movie house where all of the patrons are blind, being screened at 6:30 tonight at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown.

The screenings continue through next Wednesday at Arlington’s Capitol Theatre, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the West Newton Cinema. Some films will feature a question-and-answer session.

“People go to films to be entertained, but films can also educate, and that’s what REELAbilities does,” Remz said. “It makes us more aware of people with disabilities, and reminds us of the many ways they are like you or me. Whether the disability under question is Down syndrome or cerebral palsy or amputation or autism, it’s important to see that these people thoroughly live their lives, contribute to their community, and seek to find their own meaning of happiness.”

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