

Forward Association
Association Home Page
Events
Donate
About
Masthead
History
In the News
Contact
Advertising
Subscriptions
Editorial

Free Newsletter:



Forward.com

Film Festival Focuses on Disabilities

With Jewish Groups' Help, 'ReelAbilities' Goes National

By Gabrielle Birkner

Published February 10, 2012, issue of [February 17, 2012](#).

Evan Sneider, an alumnus of community theater and student films, got his big break in 2009 when a high school classmate, now a filmmaker, cast him as a lead in the feature film ["Girlfriend."](#) The titular girlfriend is a cash-strapped single mother caught between a violent, volatile boyfriend and a newly flush suitor, played by Sneider.

"Girlfriend" offers up a cinematic love triangle that is classic in many ways and exceptional in one: Sneider, like the character he plays, has Down Syndrome. Sneider, who is 33, told the Forward in an interview that he hopes his role will inspire other "people with disabilities to follow their passions and their dreams, and to see the opportunities that [they] have — no matter what they want to do."

The film has made the rounds at major festivals and was in movie theaters in New York and Boston last year. Now it is about to get a closer look from the disabilities community. It is one of more than a dozen films selected to screen at the [ReelAbilities](#) film festival, which, is going national this year.

Even before its expansion, ReelAbilities — started four years ago by Anita Altman, founder of UJA-Federation of New York's Task Force on People With Disabilities; Isaac Zablocki, director of film programming at the JCC in Manhattan, and others at these organizations — had become one of the largest disabilities film festivals. Widespread community interest and a major funding commitment from a Jewish philanthropy are taking the festival beyond its New York flagship.

ReelAbilities New York takes place February 9–14, with 23 participating venues in New York City, Westchester County and on Long Island.

The Cincinnati-based [Saul Schottenstein Foundation](#) is offering grants of \$5,000 a year for two years to organizations

willing to sponsor ReelAbilities festivals in their communities. The foundation is also covering the fees associated with film licensing and volunteer training, and it has paid staff devoted to coordinating the expansion efforts.

“Our goal was five cities in one year,” said Jeffrey Harris, the foundation’s chairman. “But [staffers] kept coming to me and asking, ‘Can we do one more?’”

The foundation, which gives away about \$300,000 a year, obliged. And so far, 11 additional cities — including Chicago; greater Washington, D.C.; Houston; Richmond, Va., and even the small city of Pulaski, Tenn. (pop. 7,870) — have signed on to host festivals, featuring the 2011–2012 slate of films chosen by the ReelAbilities selection committee. This year’s offerings include films made on six continents.

While the festival’s founders and many of its funders are Jewish, ReelAbilities programming and most of its host venues are not.

- [« Previous](#)
- [1](#)
- [2](#)
- [Next »](#)

Top Stories



Listening to Women



Bad Sounding 'Jew'



Not Healthy for Anyone

The Forward welcomes reader comments in order to promote thoughtful discussion on issues of importance to the

Jewish community. In the interest of maintaining a civil forum, the Forward requires that all commenters be appropriately respectful toward our writers, other commenters and the subjects of the articles. Vigorous debate and reasoned critique are welcome; name-calling and personal invective are not. While we generally do not seek to edit or actively moderate comments, the Forward reserves the right to remove comments for any reason.

COMMENTS

There are no comments posted yet. [Be the first one!](#)

To post a comment, click to login:

We put **daily back in The Jewish Daily Forward.**
Click here to get **The Forward Today**, the latest news delivered to your inbox, six days a week.



Copyright © 2012, Forward Association, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
