

## Super short festival builds film industry

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TRAVERSE CITY — Paper ballots — meh. Juried votes — boring. Movie makers relish dramatic effect, so the system that lauds or loathes them must make the cut.

Cue carefully cultivated chaos: the scene opens on solemn volunteers threading through the plush rows of Traverse City's State Theatre, stoically passing buckets like church ushers amid the thunderous plunk of marbles on plastic.

Marbles — 1,500 of them — ultimately determine the winners at the Michigan Movie Makers' Micro Movie Marathon, or M33M, running from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Feb.18 at the State Theatre. Dan Kelly, the originator of the Michigan Movie Maker's time-honored voting practice, swore he wouldn't lose any of them.

"We want it to be slightly chaotic," Kelly said. "As long as we can get the job done, chaos is good."

M33M's "job" is actually twofold. One, provide a fun way for local movie makers to show off their film chops — quickly.

The three-minute cutoff speaks volumes about their creators, Kelly said. He runs Trickster Pictures from his Beulah home.

"Movies have to be lean and mean. You have to have some storytelling prowess to get everything the audience needs to know into that time frame," Kelly said. "Are they going to get it? Are they going to laugh? Are they going to feel something? You'll find out quick."

Submissions — due before midnight Feb.16 — run the gamut from bawdy comedy to commercials. The only hard-and-fast category is the "Golden Boot" welcome to rejected Traverse City Film Festival bumpers only.



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Record-Eagle/Allison Batdorff Dan Kelly runs Trickster Pictures out of his Beulah home and organizes the Michigan Movie Makers' Micro Movie Marathon to nurture the area's filmmaking business. Festival winners are chosen by marble at the free event Feb.18 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the State Theatre.

The “boot” coincides with other tongue-and-cheek festival fare. M33M’s “Major Awards” hail from the fishnetted leg lamp of “A Christmas Story” with categories made up on the spot — like “What Would Tesla Do?” and “Tall, Blonde Girlfriend.” The physical awards are misfit objects discarded from Kelly’s home.

The big picture point, laughs aside, is to nurture the fledgling northern Michigan film “ecosystem,” Kelly said. The area is home to both commercially-successful “big fish,” plus plenty of creative small fry, which makes for a pretty good boil, Kelly said.

”We’re not an ‘industry’ yet,” Kelly said, defining industry as the condition where qualified film makers who want to work, can. “But we want to connect regional movie makers together so more stuff can happen.”

The future of Michigan’s film subsidy program — geared to lure production companies into the state with up to 42 cents on the dollar in rebates — is in question. Growing indigenous business through creative collaboration is the focus of the Michigan Movie Makers group, which meets monthly and hosts additional festivals in the fall and spring. M33M helps those in the business take stock of who is doing what behind, in front of and around the camera, Kelly said.

”It’s our chance to take inventory of ourselves,” Kelly said.

Fledgling filmmakers also learn about the realities of budgeting, locations and problem-solving, said Tom Mills, the instructor at the Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District Career Tech Center’s film and new media program. Sometimes the hard way — one group started shooting in November snows, only to grit through a December thaw before they could finish.

”For all the preparation you do, things often don’t go as planned,” Mills said.

Patrick Kelly, a big marble winner, credits M33M for honing his film editing skills and being a motivating “kick in the butt.”

”It’s a reason to be productive,” Patrick Kelly said. “The first video I ever did was filmed on a lark. It was sort of funny but kind of lame. The three-minute requirement forced me to whittle it down, cut more fat and by the time I was done, it was sharp and fast, with jokes on top of each other.”

He might not make it back for this winter marathon; he’s currently shooting a pilot in California.

Film industry fluctuations don’t scare Forrest Gelin. The 17-year-old Kalkaskan is already committed to the calling, he said.

”I already know that this is what I want to do,” said the TBAISD senior. “I don’t want to do anything else. Film is part of the exploration of human psychology, it’s one of our country’s last

exports and this is a great age to do it in because you don't need a publisher.”

He's jumping in this year with a short clip to M33M. Film's beauty is that it doesn't take long to connect to an audience, Gelinis said.

”I remember watching a movie that made me both laugh and cry within a span on five minutes and thinking ‘how can these people do that? They don't even know me, ’” Gelinis said. “I knew then — I want to do that.”

Submission information and examples of past winners are available at [michiganmoviemakers.com](http://michiganmoviemakers.com). The Feb.18 M33M is free and open to the public.