



Festival goers get their photo taken before the start of the Bonita Springs Film Festival at Prado Stadium 12 on Thursday. PHOTOS BY DOROTHY EDWARDS/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

A look back

Fourth Bonita Springs Film Festival celebrates city's history

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Bonita Springs history and local landmarks were the highlight of the Bonita Springs Film Festival gala Thursday evening.

The Imperial River, the Calusa, the Leitner House, the Liles Hotel, the Bonita Springs Elementary School and the Everglades Wonder Gardens were just a few of the many historical elements in Bonita Springs that were featured at the

fourth annual short film event. This year, the festival partnered with the Bonita Springs Historical Society for the theme "Historic Bonita." Film makers were tasked with diving into the unique aspects of Bonita Springs and the city's history.

"For me, it is fun seeing all the effort that is put into the films," said Don Thomson, an attorney with law firm Henderson Franklin and a sponsor of the festival's grand prize award. "These folks are really good. The best part is being able to watch all of them."

A panel of judges narrowed down the 51 submissions to the 10 finalist films that were shown Thursday night at the Prado Stadium 12 theater in Bonita Springs.

Participants in the 2017 festival included young filmmakers like Layla Ceden, a 12-year-old student at North Fort Myers Academy of the Arts.

Ceden was a finalist for her short film "Just the Beginning," which used photos and a voiceover to share the history of Bonita Springs.

"It's about how it was back then compared to now, like how beautiful it was

back then, the tragedies that happened and then it highlights us now," Ceden said.

First-time filmmaker Phyllis Blanchette, of Bonita Springs, was recognized with the award for Best Historic Depiction of Bonita Springs for her film "Letter to Santa."

Blanchette said the film is based on events of a hurricane in Bonita Springs in 1935. It stars Blanchette's granddaughter Evelyn, who writes a letter to Santa asking him to help her classmates who were hurt by the storm.

Blanchette came up with the idea for her short film after Hurricane Irma when she saw how children reacted to

the storm. She filmed the movie in about a day with help from the Bonita Springs Historical Society on clothing, a teddy bear and use of locations like the Casner House and the Liles Hotel.

"I love the historical society, so this theme was really a calling," she said. "But it's not my film as much as it is the little starlet's."

The Henderson Franklin Grand Prize award of \$1,000 for the best overall film went to Jesse DaSilva, 29, for his movie "Bonita Springs Past and Present."

DaSilva's film features aerial snapshots of Bonita Springs and an interview with "Calusa John" Paeno, owner of CGT Kayaks.

"My first thought was to nail the opening, so I started from the intro and went from there," he said.

Thursday night's event was the first time DaSilva entered one of his movies in a film festival.

"I put a lot of work in it," he said. "It was a fun experience and now this is the payoff."

After the audience viewed the final films and awards were announced, film festival director Antonio Correia announced the theme for the 2018 Bonita Springs Film Festival: Bonita Loves.

"This is a labor of love that starts right now with the fifth Bonita Film Festival," Correia said.

Bonita Springs Film Festival Awards

The Henderson Franklin Grand Prize -- Best Overall Film

» "Bonita Springs Past and Present" by Jesse DaSilva

The Momentum Brewhouse Award for Best Educational Film

» "Historians of Bonita Springs" by Glen Beitmen and the Super Science Kids

The Prado Stadium 12 Theaters Award for Technical Achievement in Film

» "Ancient Mystery Revealed" by Evan Johnston

The Fine Mark Award for Aspiring filmmaker - For under 18 years-old

» "Hotel Sunshine" by Connor Huseman

The Kathy McGrath Award for the best historic depiction of Bonita Springs

» "Letter to Santa" by Phyllis Blanche

Peoples' Choice Award:

» "Ancient Mystery Revealed" by Evan Johnston