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| Print Locations

| **Obituaries**

| Newsletter

Outdoor Movies Delight Thousands In SoCal

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Posted: Wednesday, July 24, 2013 6:00 am | Updated: 12:09 pm, Wed Jul 24, 2013.

By Kyriaki Rossi

Gazette Entertainment Writer

The idea for an outdoor film program in Long Beach came from the city's former Community Services Bureau Manager Chrissy Marshall, who passed away in 2009. Long Beach Recreation Supervisor Michelle Gingras said Marshall had a vision to provide outdoor movies for families.

That vision has not only been realized, but has become extremely popular in the last seven years. According to Gingras, about 10,000 people visit Long Beach parks each summer for the **Movies in the Park** program. That's nearly 500 attendees per film.

"It offers free family entertainment. You don't have to leave Long Beach," Gingras said. In fact, most who attend the outdoor films don't leave Long Beach. Gingras says 80% of all attendees are Long Beach residents. Her favorite part of the program, she says, is "just giving the families and the residents an opportunity to get together, regardless of economics."

The program does more than offer entertainment, it also raises awareness among residents about city resources. Every park in the city has the opportunity to shine, as the program moves from park to park showing films.

"People will go to parks they didn't know of, just to follow our program," Gringras said.

Thanks to an ongoing sponsorship from Signal Hill Petroleum, the city is able to offer 30 outdoor films each summer.

Long Beach's Movies in the Park ends on Aug. 28. (See a full schedule here: http://www.longbeach.gov/park/movies_in_the_park.asp.)

Cross the park and head to the beach and you'll find another outdoor film festival within city limits.

Every summer for the past nine years, Fred Khammar has been picking films, organizing details and setting up **Moonlight Movies on the Beach** for the Long Beach community. As many as 100,000 people will flock to the sand for the event. This popularity is due, at least in part, to Alfredo's Beach Club's commitment to continually increasing the quality of technology used.

"We use state-of-the-art equipment right now, but technology is changing so fast, we want to stay in tune with that," Khammar said, adding that he has brought bigger screens to the event over the years and better equipment. Soon, he says, new technology will allow families to interact with the films on their mobile device. Alfredo's is able to keep the event free and accessible through concession sales.

For those who like to explore, there are plenty of other outdoor film programs around Southern California.

Moonlight Movies on the Beach runs until Aug. 31. (See a full schedule here: <http://www.alfredosbeachclub.com/seafest-movie.html>.)

Street Food Cinema in Los Angeles combines films with live music and the delicious creations of various food trucks. The event, which has been in existence for two years, draws nearly 2,000 people to each of its films.

Event Producer Heather Hope-Allison said Street Food Cinema helps bring people with common interests together. One of her favorite parts of the event is watching everyone's combined excitement.

"There are some scenes in movies we've shown that get the crowd really excited," she said. "For example, when we played 'Jaws,' the crowd all cheered when Brody said, 'We're going to need a bigger boat.' It was very cool."

She added that Street Food Cinema "captures the essence of Los Angeles — celebrating films both old and new while introducing emerging music artists and diverse food selections."

Street Food Cinema has films scheduled until Aug. 31, with more dates being added until its close on September 21. (See a full schedule here: <http://streetfoodcinema.com/home.html>.)

Movies on the Green in Woodland Hills has been going strong for eight years. Attendance at each film has more than doubled since the start. Now, nearly 15,000 people attend the event overall.

The Valley Cultural Center chooses to show only family friendly films. VCC Executive Director Nora Ross said, "All films must take into account that an entire family can see it. That being said, our films are rated PG." The movies on the Green Committee selects the films by taking into account how recently the film was released and if there is an event corresponding to the film. For instance, this year VCC has decided to show the film "Annie," as a sing-along to celebrate its 30th anniversary. Ross said her favorite part of the event is "the fact that families get to be together."

Movies on the Green runs until Aug. 24. (See a full schedule here: <http://valleycultural.org/concerts-movies/movie-schedule/>.)

The Old Pasadena Film Festival has taken its place as an expanded festival for the last six years, showing films in parks around the community. Before that, there were limited film showings in just one park location.

About 10,000 viewers attend films in all of the various venues. This year the festival has a horror/noir theme, however organizers always try to mix in a variety of genres. Steve Mulheim, who heads the event through the Old Pasadena's Business Improvement District, calls the lineup eclectic.

"We show a number of classics, a number of things maybe from the 80's and 90's and then something that is maybe a little bit more recent," he said. "We try to encompass a lot of different genres, great old comedies, a little bit of everything."

Old Pasadena organizers choose their films by looking at Oscar Winners from the 1930's on and through the American Film Institute's Top 100 lists, then narrow the choices by taking out films that are not family friendly. Mulheim says the annual event brings with it a variety of community benefits.

"It helps to activate parks in a very positive way," he said. "It is something that our growing resident population downtown has been very appreciate of and also can be a mechanism for bringing people into Old Pasadena that might not otherwise come."

Old Pasadena Film Festival ends on July 27. (See a full schedule here: <http://www.oldpasadena.org/filmfestival/>.)

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