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Film festival gaining in stature

By [Timothy Hurley](#)
Advertiser Maui County Bureau

WAILEA, Maui — At Tommy Bahama's Tropical Cafe, a full staff is on board and extra food is waiting to be served.

"We're ready," manager Gina Dello said yesterday afternoon. "We've already had a couple of celebrities in for lunch."

Indeed, the hotels at the swank Wailea Resort are full, and Maui is abuzz about the Maui Film Festival, the island's five-day window into the glamorous world of Hollywood.

The sixth annual Maui Film Festival opened last night, kicking off a stylish event featuring 10 parties, screenings of more than 60 films and tributes to actors Jake Gyllenhaal, William H. Macy, Mike Myers and Luke, Owen and Andrew Wilson.

To listen to Maui Film Festival director and founder Barry Rivers, you would think Maui ranks right up there with Cannes and Sundance. But while it's not quite there yet, its sexy locale makes for huge potential.

Rivers describes his baby as "a monster in a box," an event that now has 80 paid seasonal workers and 250 volunteers.

"It's incredibly complex," he said of the festival preparation. "It's a cinematic Cirque de Soleil that just gets more difficult to run. This is never easy. It's endlessly challenging. I don't know what it's like to be a cowboy, but it feels like riding on a buckin' bronco for 11½ months."

While a Hawai'i Tourism Authority study estimated Maui Film Festival visitor spending at only \$1.08 million, Rivers insists it's more like three times that. Whatever numbers you want to believe, there's no doubt the festival has an impact.

Maui Mayor Alan Arakawa calls the festival a "shining star," an event that gets better year after year.



A camera crew recorded the crowd attending yesterday's Maui Film Festival opening night reception at the Fairmont Kea Lani Resort.

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- Obituaries
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- Live chats

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- Today's headlines
- Back issues

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- Nation/World news
- Movie showtimes
- Special projects
- Obituaries
- Columnists
- Photo galleries
- Blogs

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- Site map
- Corrections
- Today's front page

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"When a community of this size can reach a national and international audience, it's absolutely spectacular for us. How many communities can brag they have something of this caliber?"

Maui Film Festival

Films: More than 60 features and shorts, including "All Aboard the Crazy Train" and "My Summer of Love."

Beyond the money it generates, the Maui Film Festival tells the world what Maui is capable of doing, said Jeanne Skog, president and CEO of the Maui Economic Development Board.

Venues: Pacific Terrace in the Wailea Marriott Resort, Maui Arts & Cultural Center's Castle Theater and McCoy Theater, the Celestial Cinema at the Wailea Golf Club, and Wailea Beach.

"It shows we have the capacity to put something on that is world-class quality," she said. "And I think it has a ripple effect in other things we do in the community."

Information: (808) 572-3456,

www.mauifilmfestival.com

"It also speaks to our core values, that we prize culture and respect it as an important part of our quality of life."

Maui film commissioner Benita Brazier, a former Hollywood script supervisor who has attended her share of film festivals, ranks Maui in the top 10 of events that don't aim to sell films to the movie industry.

"I see it as a little gem," she said earlier. "This is about loving films and seeing good films. It's a festival for having a good time, for talking film and for talking to people who love film."

For Wailea, the Maui Film Festival is the resort's top tourist draw for the year, officials said.

"It is extremely important to Wailea," said Wendy Bagwill, public relations director at the Fairmont Kea Lani Resort. "It puts Wailea on the map."

Mark Simon, marketing director of the Four Seasons Wailea Resort, said the festival fills 100 rooms at the Four Seasons alone.

"No other event is close to that," he said. "This is the hottest thing going. This is the hottest thing in Hawai'i. It brings in a very Hollywood crowd and turns them on to the resort. It shows them that Wailea really is a gem and an interesting place to relax."

Tommy Bahama's Dello said the festival also brings to Wailea legions of Maui residents who rarely venture to the resort.

"The whole island gets cranked up when the film festival starts," said Michael Oleksa, manager of Cheeseburger, Mai Tais and Rock n Roll in the Shops at Wailea.

Tracy Tegarden and Sheryl Mills of Kihei were munching on pupu at yesterday's opening night reception at the Fairmont Kea Lani. Tegarden, a wedding photographer, and Mills, a wedding planner, said they had been looking forward to this for some time.

"We had always been working, and this is our first chance to get over here," Tegarden said.

Ossi and Cindy Korkeila of Lake Tahoe, Calif., were on vacation when they discovered the film festival. Cindy's sister runs the Tromso International Film Festival in Norway.

"We're here totally by coincidence. I can't wait to call her," she said.

The couple, who are buying a condo in South Maui, are already making plans to return to the festival next year, maybe even to volunteer. They said unfortunately their vacation ends before the weekend events.

"It definitely needs more advertising on the Mainland," Ossi said. "I don't know how I missed it. We booked the trip four weeks ago and I never saw anything about it."

Shelly Boucher, a CPA from Phoenix, learned about the festival only after he booked a surprise trip to Maui for his fiancee, Sylvin Lange. But he was really happy it was happening at the same time. He said it represents a special side benefit and interest for Lange, who helps put together commercials.

"But I was worried," he said. "I thought I needed a tux. I called about five times just to make sure."

No need. His stylish white shirt was fine.

"That's the great thing about the Islands," Lange said.

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[▲ Top](#)



MINI SITE MAP

- LOCAL NEWS** : Education | Obituaries | Weather | Traffic hotspots | Military news | Discussion boards | Live chat | Columnists
- SPORTS** : Surf report | UH sports | High school sports | Recreation | Sports calendar | On the Air | Golf report | National sports
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