

2007 Sundance Film Festival



Robert Redford, President and Founder of Sundance Institute

The Sundance Film Festival, attracting 45,000 people each year, has its roots going back to 1961, when **Robert Redford** first bought a spectacular piece of land in the scenic mountains of Utah. From his Santa Monica roots, and steeped in the film industry, he was determined to combine art with landscape, when he brought about the premier showcase for U.S. and international independent films. Emphasizing creative diversity and an artistic spirit, he wanted to draw attention to movies made outside the Hollywood system.

The festival later became part of the Sundance Institute, a not-for-

“In independent film there are no keys to the kingdom and there is no formula for success. The only requirements are the will, tenacity, and skill to tell a unique story in a compelling way.”
Robert Redford

profit organization also founded by Redford in 1981. Its purpose: to cultivate new work in film, theater and music and provide a powerful vehicle for presentation, administration, financial backing and a broad network of contacts. For filmmakers, just getting into the festival is an acknowledgment. What began as a vision, has become one of the most important forums in the world for independent films.

Sundance is about those artists, visionaries and genius who are willing to take a risk and make a difference; equipping humanity to transition into the next century, and getting the message out. An exciting new development this year, for filmmakers and enthusiasts alike, is the deal Sundance struck with iTunes to distribute at least 33 of the short films being shown at the Festival. Filmmakers will receive the bulk of the money with Apple, the Sundance Institute and cable television's Sundance Channel sharing the remainder. This is the first time short filmmakers have had the opportunity to enjoy such widespread distribution. This is certainly one way “to get the message out.”

And, what about the celebrity gift basket phenomenon that gets lots of attention these days? Taxable or not, some stars love to indulge, while others opt to donate to charities. Not a bad move to turn the over-commercialized part of Sundance into its original mission. At the opening news conference for the festival Redford noted the rise

PHOTO: FRED HAYES/WIREIMAGE.COM

THIS YEAR'S WINNERS IN THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES ARE:

Christopher Zalla's *Padre Nuestro*

Jason Kohn's *Manda Bala (Send a Bullet)*

James C. Strouse's *Grace is Gone*

Irene Taylor Brodsky's *Hear and Now*

Dror Shaul's *Sweet Mud*

John Carney's *Once*

David Singleton's *In the Shadow of the Moon*

Eva Mulvad and Anja Al erhayem's *Enemies of Happiness*

in celebrity giveaways, which have become pervasive in Hollywood, and said they were inevitable here given Sundance's growth.

Although Sundance is not a platform for commercial endorsements, nor it should be, every once in a while somebody comes along with an idea that fits with the message of Sundance: One example of bringing philanthropy into the picture to alleviate some of the apathy was the \$ 10,000 worth of prepaid phone cards that were donated to the U.S. military personnel overseas after a screening of "Grace is Gone", a film about a man whose wife was killed in the Iraq war.

The other was gifting health in a gift bag, pioneering into a more organic way of crossing out the diet frenzy that seems to rule America.

But the mission of Sundance rules out commercial influences: it is to champion the independent filmmakers with their truth and cold realty, artists who dig deep into themselves and into aspects of society where commercial filmmakers and Hollywood studios wouldn't dare tread. "And by

expressing alternative voices, these artists add texture to our cultural identity... [and] ...provide the kind of information that is necessary for citizens in a democracy to exercise their right and responsibility to be informed and active participants in society," Redford describes his purpose behind the vision. Robert Redford is not only a true legend but a visionary with a sharp intellect and a keen interest in delving into the human condition and initiating lasting change through sheer conviction.

It all starts in the arts, and this year, the extraordinary artists of Sundance wanted to speak up about the serious times we live in. They have created documentaries that get behind the headlines and tell true stories that look differently at the world, showing little known heroes of the past, or bring out the hero in each of us to rescue our future. Paying attention to their messages may prove a critical ingredient to making it safely into the next century. ■



Gifting Health in a Gift bag

"Wonderful messaging," said The Wall Street Journal about CUUR, a high-tech way of turning a waste line into a waistline. (Remember the documentary "Super Size Me!" that won Sundance Best Director in 2004?). "It makes you not crave sugar? I'm in!" Tom Arnold put it right, while others signed up to receive training lessons from Valerie Waters, celebrity trainer also sold on CUUR. Green Bay Packers asked for a box for each of their 53 guys on the roster. Others donated their goodies to the American Lymphoma Society.

