

Being an extra is enough to make you scream — or cry

By Lea Blevins, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

LIVERMORE — Its not often that an audience laughs, screams and cries during the same movie, but it happened at the Vine Cinema one recent morning.

But the audience members werent watching a really funny, frightening, depressing movie — they were in one.

More than 90 people — including yours truly — showed up at 9:30 a.m. one Saturday this month to be volunteer extras in a scene for a promotional video for the upcoming California Independent Film Festival.

Filmmaker Scott Cornfield, a previous festival participant, directed his cast of extras through a variety of emotions to express for the camera.

With bright lights shining in our faces, it was our job to show emotional reactions — to a blank movie screen.

It started out relatively easy. Local comedian John Dekoven got us warmed up by telling jokes and funny stories. The only part that felt strange was staring at the screen instead of at Dekoven.

But our laughter was real.

Next, we had to act fearful. Whatever movie we were supposed to be watching must have been the most suspenseful one ever because the whole audience was cued to scream in unison.

The screaming turned out to be fun — something we could all be good at. It also got our energy going.

And then we had to cry.

No wonder Hollywood stars are such drama queens: When youre forced to be happy, scared and sad all in less than an hour, you feel a little loony.

Acting sad was probably the most challenging emotion to portray, but not for the participant sitting next to me.

Pleasanton resident Judy Fenton shed actual tears.

I just started thinking of sad things — horrible things happening in the world, she said. I started thinking how it would relate to me ... and it just started flowing out. I felt the emotion.

Perhaps she was better suited for the role than some of the rest of us.

After we were done, Cornfield set up his camera outside in front of the theaters box office and conducted interviews with several people who attended the film festival in previous years.

Volunteer Coordinator Stephanie Petermeier put in her two cents on camera and then chatted with other volunteers about the mornings taping.

It was fun, she said. It gets you to thinkabout how you react in a movie."

The video will be available online prior to the festival, but was still being edited last week . Coordinators plan to bring it along when they make presentations to various local groups to advertise the festival.

The 2006 California Independent Film Festival is slated for Oct. 25-29 in Livermore. It will feature more than 70 films showcased at Livermore Valley wineries and the Vine Cinema.

This year's Lifetime Achievement Award winner will be Ned Beatty, who will be honored at a Tribute Night at the Robert Livermore Community Center. A showing of one of Beatty's movies, "Deliverance," will follow at the Vine Cinema.

Other events include an opening night reception, the Iron Filmmaker Contest and a poker tournament hosted by Christopher Knight and Adrianne Curry, along with film showings throughout the weekend.

To purchase tickets, go online to <http://www.caindiefest.com> or call (925) 552-REEL.

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