

Local students win state filmmaking prize

By David Salcido
Desert Exposure

Student filmmakers, teachers and parents packed the Kiva Auditorium in Albuquerque on Sunday, April 6, for the awards ceremony for Film Prize Junior New Mexico's 4th annual student short film festival. After a record-breaking 192 student short films were screened at the festival, twenty-nine winning films were announced and over \$12,000 in scholarships and media grants were awarded to students, teachers and schools at the ceremony.

Among the schools winning prizes at the event were Organ Mountain High School in Las Cruces, winning Best High School Documentary for "Henry C. Trost: Architect of Arid America"; Deming High School winning Best High School Drama for "Ukiyo"; Red Mountain Middle School, also in Deming, winning both the Middle School Audience Choice and Best Middle School



All of the students who took part in Film Prize Junior on Sunday, April 6. (Courtesy photos)

Film Poster for "Coulrophobia"; and Mescalero Apache High School winning High School Emerging Native Filmmaker for "Isdzana Tleesh: White Painted Woman."

Now in its fourth year in New Mexico, Film Prize Junior is the student version of the award-winning Louisiana Film Prize, a short film competition with the largest cash prize in the world for an independent short film. The Film Prize Junior program supports

middle and high school classrooms to experience the entire process of creating a short film, from story and script development to production and editing.

The 192 short films were created by middle and high school students from 83 schools in 22 NM counties, representing rural, urban and Tribal communities across the state. The program organizers believe that the process, which culminates in all completed

films being featured on the big screen at the festival, is transformative for the kids.

Taking home prizes for the fourth year in a row, the Deming High School Media Club has earned a reputation for being award winners. Something media teacher and sponsor Jesse Kriegel is very proud to discuss.

"We've been with Film Prize Junior since the first year and, not to toot our own horn, but we are the winningest school in

the competition," Kriegel said. "The first year we won Best of Show and Audience Choice in the high school category, the second year we won Audience Choice, Best Thriller and Founder's Choice. Last year, we had a middle school student join us and she won Best Animation, Audience Choice and Best of Show and this year that same student won Audience Choice and Best Movie Poster, while one of our high school students won Best Drama. We're just thrilled to be part of the event in general, but the experience has been phenomenal. I think it's great that the students have this kind of outlet to tell their stories through film."

In addition to screening the 192 films and audience members voting for the audience choice awards, the Film Prize Junior New Mexico

Festival featured panel discussions with film industry professionals and hands-on equipment demos led by Central New Mexico Community College's film department.

"The packed theaters and incredible group of student films made this a magical year for Film Prize Junior New Mexico," said Gregory Kallenberg, Executive Director of the Prize Foundation and Film Prize Junior. "While I'm incredibly proud of our winners, I'm equally proud of all of the students and teacher mentors for making a film and showing it at our fest. We've loved seeing the excitement around and growth of this program, and we can't wait to see the films these amazing students create for Film Prize Junior New Mexico 2026!"

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Deming High School winners of the Best Drama award for "Ukiyo," from left: Kinari Marquez (Actor), Mariana Dominguez (Director), Yadier Acuna (actor).



Deming Middle School winner Hannah Gutierrez and her cousin, holding awards for Audience Choice and Best Movie Poster for "Coulrophobia."

premiere film school for high school and middle school students, as well as producing future filmmakers like Kriegel's son, who is currently enrolled at NMSU in the CMI program, you can bet that Deming will be among the schools represented in next year's competition.

"We've already got another group of students coming up who are in-

spired," Kriegel said. "We take our whole media club with us to the competition, so we had some students who didn't produce films this year, but before the weekend was over, they were already brainstorming ideas for next year. I think that's what it's all about."

To learn more about Film Prize Junior, visit FilmPrizeJr.com/new-mexico/.

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