

FARMINGTON – Seventy-five people gathered together on June 23, to celebrate the Navajo language and culture at the inaugural Navajo Film Festival. After watching all of the submissions, the audience selected *Hunter*, by Faith Toledo, as their favorite submission. Meanwhile, three judges selected *Vision*, by Keanu Jones, for 1st Place in the Adult Category, and *Fish in Beauty*, by Isaiah Crowfoot, for 1st Place in the Youth Category.

Grandma, What Are You Doing? by Benford Beco Begay, *Love Story* by Faith Browning, and *D éélgéédby* Elias Gold also received awards. A total of $900 was distributed to the winners.

“I’ve been involved in a number of different film festivals in different communities, and it is a real challenge to get them off the ground.” said Michael Lewis, a co-organizer of the event from Los Angeles. “But in terms of the number of films received, the quality of films, and the attendance at the event, this really exceeded expectations.”

That’s because of the unique opportunity presented by this Festival.

“Many members of our community want to participate in art that uses our own language, but don’t have an outlet to do so. Our Festival provided a new venue for that, and people reacted with a lot of enthusiasm and passion,” said Tacey Atsitty, the director of the festival.

In addition to screening the competition films, the Festival included special screenings of the films *Amásání* by Stacy Howard and *Shimásání* by Blackhorse Lowe. Pyn Francisco, a Native

Casting Director, and Pony Vigil, a Producer at NativeFlix, also attended the Festival, and offered words of advice to burgeoning filmmakers looking to get into the industry. The Festival concluded with a reception to celebrate the winners, at which the band Our Last Chants performed, and traditional Navajo tea and blue corn cupcakes were served.

About the Navajo Film Festival

The goal of the Navajo Film Festival is to promote the Navajo language by encouraging both Navajo speakers to make films, and existing filmmakers to use the Navajo language in their work. All prize eligible films were required to be no longer than 4 minutes and shot entirely in the Navajo language. For more information go to navajofilmfestival.org or contact the organizers at navajofilmfestival@gmail.com .

Staff Reports