

## Wowza! Gallup Film Festival closes a standout 2016

Written by By Bernie Dotson  
Friday, 23 September 2016 03:00

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Now that the 2016 Gallup Film Festival has come to a close, we can safely say it boasted a unique schedule of shorts, documentaries, and features in what we hope is becoming a Gallup institution. The event brought all kinds of people downtown – close to 3,000, by some estimates. And the city should pat itself on the back for investing in this venture.

This isn't to say past editions of the GFF have been lackluster. Each of the last three festivals has offered up a handful of truly memorable and brilliant selections. And there have been some misfires, too.

The directors and stars who attend film festivals hope to create buzz from advanced screenings. The offering of sneak-peaks is a nice perk, especially for a small festival like the GFF; everybody wins.

The takeaways from the 2016 Gallup Film Festival? Run, don't walk to see films like *Te Ata*, which is based on an inspiring and true story of Mary Thompson Fisher from the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma. The film's protagonist is a woman who traverses cultural barriers to become one of the greatest Native American performers ever. Born in Indian Territory, Te Ata's journey to find her true calling leads her through isolation, discovery, love, and a stage career that culminates in performances for presidents and royalty.

Whispers about the 2016 GFF being a barren wasteland, devoid of star-power and poorly attended are just that — rumors. Those of us who were there know differently.

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Festival Director Knifewing Segura outdid himself this year, bringing in Martin Sensmeier of the Tlingit and Koyukon-Athabascan Alaskan tribe, who stars alongside Denzel Washington in a remake of *The Magnificent Seven*. Did anybody tally the number of complimentary photos that Sensmeier took with locals?

And for local folk who attended the GFF, Thoreau's renaissance man Roger Willie (*Windtalkers*, 2002

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was on hand to provide film synopses and entertainment for his new film *The Watchman's Canoe*.

Willie and

*Canoe*

director Barri Chase gave a short talk about the film to festivalgoers.

*Te Ata*, which was shown Sept. 17, was packed to the gills with people filling up Coal Avenue's El Morro Theatre. This festival, like any other, had its usual ebb and flow. But for the most part, people went away with a sense of enjoyment.

Segura put some films in this fest that are sure to resurface elsewhere at a later date.

We'll see you at the movies.

**By Bernie Dotson**