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Film fest is part of our city's growth

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My View

Tallahassee is rarely recognized as a destination for young professionals to begin their careers. They don't realize what they're passing up.

Tallahassee is a city rich with Southern charm, and its attributes include nationally recognized parks, a dedication to higher education, a vast political arena, and a variety of restaurants and venues. Even 24-hour public radio programming is a perk. Tallahassee is a unique combination of big-city culture and small-town appeal.

Or, at least, it's getting there. While not yet the next Portland or Atlanta, Tallahassee is fast becoming a cultural hub, thanks, in large part, to a yearlong project seeking to transform the city into a better version of itself. With a long-term goal to draw and retain young professionals of the creative class, like myself, to begin their careers here, the catalysts in the Knight Creative Communities Initiative focused on refining the city's culture, and the Tallahassee Film Festival (TFF) was born.

As a volunteer for the festival, I can express only great excitement about the benefits it will bring to our community. The inaugural festival, and a project of The International Creativity Center Inc., TFF will showcase Tallahassee to filmmakers and film industry professionals while encouraging local and regional residents to learn more about the film industry.

The connection Tallahassee has to the film industry is a great, untapped resource that this festival is aiming to unveil. With the award-winning programs and resources at Florida State, Florida A&M and Tallahassee Community College, the festival has a good chance of becoming a beacon for new and emerging talent around the region, nation and, perhaps, the globe.

With so many film festivals around the world, the volunteers for the festival thought long and hard about what a film festival in Tallahassee should strive to represent and the type of festival it ultimately should become.

I think Jeanne Curtin, president of the Tallahassee Film Festival, said it best when a group of our volunteers agreed that a film festival in Tallahassee wouldn't be about glitz and glamour, but about the art. "Tallahassee is a city with so much cultural potential and has strong connections to the film industry, so our main objective should be to focus on the filmmakers and what they have to say."

Always keeping this goal in mind, the end product of the first festival — which is quickly approaching — is bound to offer that extra punch of culture and art this city is craving.

The festival, presented by the Florida Commerce Credit Union, debuts on May 15 and lasts for three days until the culmination of the "It's a Wrap" party on May 17. The community is invited to the StarFest Downtown Get Down, a red-carpet event featuring open-air movie screenings, entertainment, food vendors and exhibits.

During the festival, attendees will have a chance to view dozens of film screenings at four different venues around town: the FSU Askew Student Life Center, Heritage Hall at the R.A. Gray Building, All Saints Cinema and the FAMU School of Journalism and Graphic Communication Lecture Hall.

This coming weekend (May 3-4), amateur and professional filmmakers have the chance to enter the 24-Hour Film Contest. Interested participants will have the opportunity to compete for prizes by producing their own short films that will be featured on the *Tallahassee Democrat* Web site, Tallahassee.com.

While I believe that Tallahassee already is a great place to live and work, there is still work to be done on improving its cultural appeal. With community-wide participation, the Tallahassee Film Festival will become a Tallahassee tradition, and hopefully one day we'll look back with a smile at what we've accomplished.