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## Film festival sets stage for economic boost

Organizers look to similar events to estimate benefits

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This week's Tallahassee Film Festival may become the community's next economic booster, with organizers anticipating, among other things, that it may encourage filmmakers to return to the area when making movies.

"If you look at the whole state of Florida there is no other region that is more beautiful than North Florida," said Chucha Barber, vice president for the Tallahassee Film Festival. "If you want to film something with an antebellum location or a modern building, you can do that right here in Tallahassee."

While there is no way to know how much the festival will financially benefit the community, organizers look to the Durango (Colo.) Independent Film Festival for an early estimate. The Durango festival brought more than \$303,000 into the local economy during its 2006 debut, with more than half that money being spent inside La Plata County.

Barber said both the Tallahassee and Durango festivals show a little more than 60 films and were marketed to local residents. In Colorado, the most money spent on admission was by attendees ages 18 to 34, which is what Barber said Tallahassee organizers are hoping for.

Film festivals are blooming like magnolias in many communities. Each week Dave Schmeling, community liaison at the Florida State University College of Motion Picture, Television and Recording Arts, sends Barber and others an e-mail detailing the average 15 new film festivals that are being started across the country.

The event Barber and others see as a model for what Tallahassee could become in the near future is the Sarasota Film Festival. Founded in 1998 with \$300,000 — three times larger than Tallahassee's budget — that event has grown to bring an estimated \$6 million to the Southwest Florida community. While hotels, restaurants and others benefit from the 10-day festival, executive director Jody Kielbasa said having the event recognized nationally and internationally has had an intangible economic impact on the city as well.

"I think Tallahassee has all the potential in the world to have a great film festival," Kielbasa said, warning that exuberance should be tempered. "Every festival that is built, I think the organizers have to go in and assess what is going to work for their community."

The Sarasota festival exemplifies one that quickly caught the public's attention, said Lucia Fishburne, commissioner in the Governor's Office of Film & Entertainment. She added marketing FSU's world-renowned film school and Tallahassee's colleges and universities may help its festival develop.

"It's quite a milestone," Fishburne said of the area's first film festival, "especially when you consider we have one of the top film schools in the country in the FSU film school. It's very timely because there is a budding art community and a music community, so you have a core creative community here."

With numerous award-winning faculty members, FSU provides expertise that other festivals across the state may not have. University faculty also have relationships with other professionals who will enrich the festival.

Paul Cohen, a motion picture distributor/producer and filmmaker-in-residence at FSU, has visited numerous festivals around the world, including the Cannes Film Festival — which he is skipping this week to attend Tallahassee's event. Based on his experience, local businesses will make tens of thousands of dollars this year from the festival.

Cohen has seen many festivals grow and "impact their community tremendously, almost without exception."

If the Tallahassee Film Festival is to grow, Cohen said the community must support it from a word-of-mouth and financial standpoint. That will attract more visitors and more money to this area. "The opportunity for commercial impact is the awareness that Tallahassee is a full-range cultural community, from art to opera to now a film festival."