



## Film fest facing financial crisis

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**BY JENN MCKEE**

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Controversy over state funding for the Ann Arbor Film Festival has led to a financial crunch for the event and a public fundraising campaign to stabilize it.

Without the expectation of future grant money - and without the final installment of the past year's \$13,650 grant, which has so far been withheld - the festival has found itself in dire financial straits.

"We're very dependent right now, during this time of year," said the festival's executive director, Christen McArdle. "There's an ebb and flow to the cash flow of the festival. It was a pretty bad hit, and at the worst time possible. ... We're surviving month to month right now."

This spring, the festival's state funding - which represents about 5 percent of its annual budget - came under fire. State Rep. Shelly Taub, R-Bloomfield Hills, proposed excluding the festival from funding for two years, saying it had shown movies that could be considered pornography in violation of state guidelines for arts grants.

Those who run the annual March festival - which has shown experimental, independent features and shorts from around the world since 1963 - rejected the idea that any of the work they show could be classified as pornography. But even so, they decided not to even apply for state funding, regardless of whether Taub's measure ultimately succeeded or not.

The festival's fiscal woes are particularly tough to take given that McArdle hoped to expand the budget (last year's totaled \$192,000) in order to keep up with the event's exponential growth. For since the previously 16mm film festival opened its doors to digital and video formats a few years ago, submissions jumped from 500 to more than 2,000 in number, overwhelming the festival's small staff.

And although the film submission fees that come with all these entries provide the festival with a good portion of its revenue, the festival doesn't accept submissions until after July 1, and the bulk of entries don't come in until late summer, at which point the staff must focus on planning for the festival and screening entries.

"This narrows the time to really spend our time raising money," said McArdle. "The bottleneck begins."

To help the festival survive, radio station WQKL (107.1 FM) was expected to announce today, during Martin Bandyke's program, that it will host an all-day, on-air fundraiser Tuesday, Aug. 1. It will also be broadcast on sister station WLBY (1290 AM), the local affiliate of the liberal-talk "Air America" network.

"What we were planning is ... a sort of request-a-thon in support of the Ann Arbor Film Festival, where listeners will be encouraged to call the station and make a donation to the festival, to help see it through these tough times," said WQKL program director Brad Savage. "It's a real threat that the festival may cease to exist. ... We want to just make sure that it can continue in the future."

To this end, listeners will be able to request all kinds of songs, including those not normally heard on the adult-alternative station - for a price.

WQKL was a sponsor of the festival this year, and according to McArdle, the festival hasn't lost any sponsors as a result of the state funding controversy.

Said Savage, "For us, it's not so much whether you agree with it politically or not, or the hoopla that's going on ... For us, it's just more of preserving this continuous arts organization that's a marquee annual event in

Ann Arbor."

McArdle views the festival's fund-raising goals in two tiers. "There's the first goal of recovering the money that's lost," she said. "But then there's a second goal of just getting the festival on stable financial ground altogether. Whether it's this fundraiser or any fundraiser in the next three or four months, we need to raise 30 or 40 thousand dollars just to get the festival on stable ground."

Supporters may send donations to the Ann Arbor Film Festival office at 203 E. Ann St., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104, or visit the membership page at [www.aafilmfest.org](http://www.aafilmfest.org).

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