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Film festival honors Seinfeld actor Knight

By Lea Blevins LIVERMORE , STAFF WRITER

Article Last Updated: 04/19/2007 08:04:13 AM PDT

DOWNTOWN got glitzed up to welcome a piece of Hollywood to town Wednesday night for the opening reception of the California Independent Film Festival.

Celebrities, filmmakers and local residents mingled at the Zephyr Grill & Bar before heading to the Vine Cinema for screenings of short film The Clap and feature film Forfeit.

Wayne Knight, best known for his portrayal of Newman on the TV show Seinfeld, had a role in Forfeit and attended the event Wednesday to receive the festival's Spirit Award for his work in independent films.

The comedic Knight described earning the award as unusual but pleasant as he chatted with Forfeit writer/producer John Lee.

Lee said it was fabulous to simply be part of a film festival, but was especially pleased to be part of opening night.

When you open a film festival, its a great honor, Lee said.

Knight said acting in independent films gives him a chance to

get out of roles in which hes normally typecast and explore other kinds of work.

Coming to the festivals, he said, is also a wonderful experience for him.

I love the spirit of it, Knight said.

Forfeit co-star Gregory Itzin, known for his role as President Logan on TV show 24, also was in town for the event.

Itzin said this was his first independent movie in as long as he could remember and also his first real film festival.

Im kind of liking it, he said.

The actor used to live in San Francisco and said he was eager to return to the Bay Area.

Although

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Livermore mayor Mashall Kamena, Dale Kaye of the Livermore Chamber of Commerce, with actor Wayne Knight who played Newman on Seinfeld during the opening night ceremony for the Livermore Film Festival April 18th 2007. (Mike Lucia/Tri-Valley Herald)

stage acting is his favorite art form, Itzin said he appreciates independent films because the filmmakers typically arent driven by studio money.

Its a much more personal vision, he said.

Filmmakers from all over the country, plus some international artists, attend the festival each year.

Austin, Texas, resident Rowdy Stovall was in Livermore to promote his feature film Mexican Sunrise, which will play Friday at the Vine Cinema.

The Livermore screening will be the second showing of his film, after it premiered a few weeks ago in Los Angeles.

Stovall was quick to mention the friendliness of people in Livermore.

Mexican Sunrise, a thriller based on a true story, was shot in 27 different locations in 18 days.

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Stovall said he was nervous to have his film play at the festival.

You throw your stuff up on the screen, and you just hope people respond to it, he said.

The film will play at the same screening with family drama Simple Things, directed by Los Angeles resident Andrew Erin.

The feature film includes such actors as Mickey Jones, Edie McClurg and Amber Benson. Erin said it was Jones who told him about the festival.

He said that while it is magical to be in a room with an audience watching your film, he enjoys meeting other filmmakers as well.

I like to see the variety of films that you wouldnt typically see, Erin said.

The festival, which runs through Sunday, includes other celebrity guests, such as Loni Anderson and Barbara Eden.

Livermore Mayor Marshall Kamena said he gets excited to meet actors he has seen on television and in films for years.

It makes you feel like a real part of Hollywood, he said.

Kamena added that the film festival is one of his favorite occasions held in Livermore each year.

Its a nice cultural event and it tends to put Livermore on the map, he said.

For more information on the California Independent Film Festival, visit <http://www.caindiefest.com> or call (925) 362-9734. The festival has a temporary office through Friday in the Old Theater Mall, 2222 Second St., Suite 3, Livermore.

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