

BendFilm Festival Founder Steps Down as Executive Director

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Katie Merritt assumes role of Development Director -- National search being conducted to fill Managing Director position -- As festival grows in size and popularity, demand outpaces current staffing and warrants additional focus on fundraising efforts. The BendFilm Festival announced Wednesday that Katie Merritt will be stepping down as Executive Director of the three-year-old independent film festival, assuming the role of Development Director as a nationwide search is initiated for a permanent Managing Director. Merritt, the founder of BendFilm, will focus her efforts on year-round contributions and fundraising for the Festival, which account for 65 percent of BendFilm's annual operating income.

"BendFilm has benefited greatly from having a founder and director with Katie's commitment, dedication and tireless effort that have established BendFilm as one of the country's premier independent film festivals," said Stephen Archer, President of the BendFilm Board of Directors. "As development director, her contacts and relationships in the community and the industry will help solidify BendFilm's financial security for years to come." Merritt originally announced her intention to take on a reduced role to the Board of Directors in February, but delayed any public announcement until now to ensure that the 2006 Festival played out without distraction, focusing instead on the films, the filmmakers and the audience that make BendFilm what it is. "We have been fortunate to build a successful festival with little more than wit and perspiration to work from," said Merritt. "While it's time to hand the reigns over to a real pro, we are being extremely selective in our search for a new Managing Director who understands and embraces the Festival's values of respect for the filmmakers and commitment to keeping the founding spirit alive." The Board of Directors has engaged Express Personnel to conduct a national search for candidates, and a handful of applicants are being given serious consideration as Merritt's successor. The Board of Directors is intent on finding a replacement with years of film festival experience. "We are happy to be in a position of growth with BendFilm, and the division of responsibilities between a managing director and development director will contribute to the sustained health of the Festival and the growth of its programs," said Archer. "The Board of Directors is reviewing applications from around the country from individuals well-positioned to bring a national perspective to the managing director's position, which is a reflection of the excellence we have enjoyed under Katie's leadership to date." In the development director role, Merritt's commitment to BendFilm will be reduced to approximately 25 hours per week. Merritt and her husband, Peter Gramlich, are preparing to adopt a child and the reduced role will allow the couple to dedicate the time necessary to starting a family. "The support we have received from the community, filmmakers and the national press has been staggering," said Merritt. "When we started three years ago, critics evaluated BendFilm as a festival that might someday break into the top ten in the country. Today they are no longer speaking in terms of 'if,' but 'when' that will happen." About BendFilm: BendFilm is a non-profit group inspired by the opportunity to open doors for artists and to cast Bend, Oregon as the cultural and economic beneficiary. The BendFilm Festival runs every fall in downtown Bend at venues including McMenamins Old St. Francis School, Regal Old Mill Cinemas and the Tower Theatre. The 2006 BendFilm Festival attracted more than 800 film submissions and screened more than 100 films to an audience of more than 12,000. BendFilm's offices are located at 520 SW Powerhouse Drive, #628, directly above Victoria's Secret in The Shops at The Old Mill District. For more information call 541-388-FEST, e-mail: info@BendFilm.org, or visit www.BendFilm.org.

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