

# NJ Film history at Oscar Shorts Underdogs



A still from "Hair Love." COURTESY OSCAR SHORTS

*Oscar Shorts: Celebrate the Underdog short film festival  
Saturday, Feb. 8, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.*

*All nominated short films.*

*David Schoner, associate director of the NJ Motion Picture &  
Television Commission, to speak at 1 p.m.*

*Buzz Aldrin Middle School, 173 Bellevue Ave.*

[oscarshortsmontclair.com](http://oscarshortsmontclair.com)

**By GWEN OREL**

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Corinna Sager and Jeanne Reilly have been bringing the Oscar-nominated short films to Montclair for 10 years: this year marks the 11th time Montclairites will have an opportunity to see all the films nominated for Academy Awards, introduced by category by Sager herself.

Sager had co-produced the Oscar-nominated short film “Ferry Tales” in 2004, and knows the process from the inside.

As in previous years, there will be a morning session, a break and an afternoon session. Live action short films will be shown in the morning, with animated and documentary shorts screened in the afternoon.

Among this year’s 15 films are “Nefta Football Club,” a live action film made in Tunisia and France about two football fan brothers and a headphones-wearing donkey – who has a hidden drug stash – in Algeria; “Learning to Skateboard in Warzone (if You’re a Girl),” by Carol Dysinger and Elena Andreicheva, of the UK, a short documentary about young girls in Kabul learning to read, write and skateboard; and “Kitbull,” an animated short by Rosana Sullivan and Kathryn Hendrickson, of the USA, about an independent stray kitten and a chained-up pit bull who become friends.

A complete list is on the [Oscar Shorts website](#).

This year, Associate Director of the NJ Motion Picture & Television Commission David Schoner will speak. It’s the first time the Underdog Short Film Festival has had a guest speaker.

The agency promotes filmmaking in New Jersey, and works to attract filmmakers to the state, offering economic benefits, and facilitating the process of filming when moviemakers are here.

Schoner, a resident of Cedar Grove, has been with the agency since 1985. He loves film,



DAVID SCHONER

and has made a few himself: He produced “A Dangerous Place” in 2012, which was shown on the film festival circuit, and the short “Leo” in 2020. (More credits can be found on [IMDB.com](https://www.imdb.com).)

“I would make Super-8 movies as a teen,” Schoner said. “I had a paper route. I knew what it would cost to get Super-8 film and develop it, and I knew I had to get that in tips.”

The Oscar Shorts festival excites Schoner, because “the general public doesn’t have the opportunity or exposure to see those short films. Sometimes even if you are in the film world you don’t.

“Short films are another form of the art of filmmaking.”

The interesting stories told in a compact period of time can have a disproportionate impact, he said. Audiences can be used to how long a full-length movie should be, and come to expect what will happen when, but a short film, with varying lengths, still needs to tell a complete story: and audiences can be surprised.

“They are little mini-art forms. It’s great to see a short documentary, which gives a bunch of information and resolves itself,” he said.

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Schoner especially loves the animated shorts. "With [live-action] film, you can film a lot of stuff, and in the editing room cut down to what works.

"When animating, it takes so much time, energy and money... to do sequences that don't work or don't use does not make sense." Animation has to have precise planning, he said.

He's excited by "Hair Love," by Matthew A. Cherry and Karen Rupert Tolliver. "It's an animated movie about a father having to work on his daughter's hair. It's great on multiple levels.

"I'm on board of Women in Media – a film festival that takes place in March, Women's History month. We screen movies over nine days that are movies for women, about women, by female filmmakers, and topics that deal with women, whether it's child marriage, human trafficking... one year we did a whole day on women and their perception of their hair, how people receive you and react to you via your hair. This animated film addresses that." The festival takes place in Newark, Maplewood and East Orange.



A still from "Learning to Skateboard in a warzone (if you're a girl)." COURTESY OSCAR SHORTS

## NEW JERSEY FILM

Schoner, who works to keep filmmakers coming to New Jersey will speak about New Jersey's history of film on Saturday. New Jersey is the birthplace of film, he said. He will show a short film – appropriate for the day – on Thomas Edison and how film language began in Fort Lee and West Orange.

"Fort Lee was a massive hub back in the day," he said. Then, moviemakers left for Hollywood.

Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" (2020) and "The Joker" (2019) are examples of recent films made in New Jersey. Schoner will also take audience questions.

"Montclair is a big film town. It's one of the top five places in the state for filming," Schoner said. "There is a very vibrant artistic community, and it really shows." He attends the Montclair Film Festival, and enjoys seeing films that have not had a wider release yet.

The people who come to the Underdog Festival may not be cinephiles in the traditional sense, but something makes them want to come see these nominated shorts, he continued. "There is a creative community here that passionately wants to see this art form and style of filmmaking."