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DOWNTOWN HOTEL GIVEN NEW LIFE BY CITY STAFF REVIEW

LEGAL LOOPHOLES KEEP RESIDENCE HOTEL PROJECT IN MOTION

By Christian Kallen

The controversy surrounding Healdsburg's downtown hotel ordinance, which restricted new construction to five rooms per block face and was passed late in 2018 by a 4-1 vote of the City Council, took a new and for many unwelcome turn last week.

On Thursday, Sept. 7, the City of Healdsburg issued a social media notice via Facebook saying that the ordinance had been improperly "published," and was therefore invalid—allowing Piazza Hospitality to continue with their plans for a 16-room, 37-bedroom five-story hotel at 400 Healdsburg Ave.

That hotel project had been put at risk when a press investigation, published in the *Tribune* on Aug. 3 of this year, revealed Piazza had failed to meet the deadline for approval of their application by one day, which meant their planned hotel could not legally be approved.

Piazza is the developer of the H2 Hotel, sister hotel to Hotel Healdsburg, and the Harmon Guest House. Another hotel would give the same body of owners a near-monopoly on downtown Healdsburg Avenue hotels.

Following that discovery, the City Council met at least twice in Closed Session, on Aug. 18 and Sept. 5, to evaluate a "threat of litigation" surrounding the permitting issue. At least one of those threats now appears to have originated from within city staff itself, and not from Piazza.

"In conducting an internal review, City Staff discovered the ordinance adopted on Dec. 17, 2018 was published incorrectly

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Photo courtesy of Healdsburg International Short Film Festival

TRANSITION The black-and-white, 'Just an Evening,' changes into color with the arrival of an air-raid siren in Olga Gibelinda's short film, to be screened at the Healdsburg International Short Film Festival.

Short Films Return to the Raven

HEALDSBURG THEATER SCREENS AND BENEFITS FROM ONE-DAY FESTIVAL

By Christian Kallen

Not to be overlooked in the return of the Healdsburg International Short Film Festival—a one-day banquet of narrative inspiration, 22 films spread over two screenings on Saturday, Sept. 23—is the name. It's an international festival, with films from Argentina, Cameroon, Germany, Ireland and other countries.

And the films are short. Some of them very short.

Among them is *Just an Evening*, from Ukraine. It's without dialogue, largely in black and white, almost stripped of plot, aside from a young woman walking at night through the nearly-deserted capital on an errand. Filmed between missile attacks in Kyiv last year, Olga Gibelinda's brief film makes a single quiet statement that seems to resonate beyond its borders—the sort of trick that only a well-done short film can make without pretension.

"We made the movie during a blackout in Kyiv this winter," Gibelinda said via email. "Our power grids were damaged by Russian missile attacks, and we had a rough schedule of when the power would be back on." The film, which barely breaks three minutes in length, was filmed on one night and edited the next day.

"However, I believe that such conditions set a great challenge for the script and the idea. If the idea can withstand the lack of full production, then it was a good idea," she said.

Gibelinda will not be one of the filmmakers at the festival in Healdsburg this year, though her first film, *Something*, was screened in the precursor festival in 2012 held in Bodega Bay. Now, she is busy producing and working on several films, all in Europe, both documentaries and features.

One of these further limits her movement. "Since part of the shooting takes place in the 'red zone,' I am bound by a specific schedule from the military," Gibelinda explained.

These are not the sorts of hurdles that most North

American filmmakers encounter, but it speaks to the undeniable commitment many artists bring to their work, in whatever medium.

The Medium Is the Message

Just an Evening is one example of the personal, even eccentric project that can be found in a film festival. While major festivals—Cannes, Sundance, even the local Sonoma Valley International Film Festival—do feature highly personal projects by talented filmmakers, such feature films present an inherent challenge for many in the audience.

"I really get frustrated when I go to a film festival, and it's a coveted ticket, and I sit there for two hours, and it's just a turkey," said Kirk Demorest, who with his wife, Pamela Demorest, is producing the one-day festival. "Or it doesn't match your aesthetics or whatever. It's frustrating."

With a short film festival, however, the material changes every few minutes. One film may be funny, another dramatic, a third heart-breaking.

Each one is different. "The thing that's cool about it is you get a different flavor of these voices from all around the world, because everyone has a perspective, whereas you only get one perspective in a feature film," he said.

But, he added, "I would say the biggest thing that I like about it is that it's a format that's affordable for filmmakers to do a really cool film."

For instance, a film in this year's festival called *The Space Between Us* was a one-person project, an animated film done on a home computer. Even more notable, Pamela Demorest said, "We've had kids in Africa with iPhones shoot films and send them to us that have been great."

Proceeds benefit the Raven Education Program,

which is offering a teen acting class this fall.

As with many film festivals, there will be awards given—modest \$500 cash awards to a handful of winning filmmakers. In the case of the Healdsburg International Short Film Festival, the judges bring their own celebrity to the process: Oscar-nominated screenwriter and director Billy Ray (*Captain Phillips*, *The Hunger Games*), independent filmmaker Ellie Foubmi and singer-songwriter Tom Waits, with his creative partner Kathleen Brennan.

"I can say that culture turns out to be a very powerful element of connecting people and senses; it's very valuable," said Ukraine's Gibelinda. "And I'm really a Tom Waits fan, so it's a special miracle for me that the person who had a great influence on the formation of my musical and cultural taste will watch my little film."

Screenings are Saturday, Sept. 23, at 2 and 7:30pm. Each program is different. More information and ticket links can be found at healdsburgfilm.com.



Photo courtesy City of Healdsburg

CLEANUP Young volunteers track down and capture trash along the railroad tracks during last year's Foss Creek Clean-up, which takes place on Sept. 23 this fall.

ANNUAL FOSS CREEK CLEAN-UP COMING SEPT. 23

VOLUNTEER ACTION AIMS TO PROTECT ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE

Healdsburg's Foss Creek Clean-up will take place Saturday morning, Sept. 23, with the Community Center serving as the base of operations. Since 2005, the annual clean-up event has been an opportunity for residents to participate in the maintenance and protection of the creek by

removing trash and debris from Foss Creek.

Foss Creek is a tributary of the Russian River that runs north-south through town. It serves as a home to several species, including steelhead trout protected by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The creek also funnels storm water runoff from the city to the Russian River.

Volunteers will gather in the south parking lot at the Community Center (1557 Healdsburg Ave.) from 8:30 to 9am, where they will sign up and be divided into five groups. An assortment of pastries (provided by Healdsburg Sunrise Rotary) will be available.

Mayor Ariel Kelley will give opening remarks, followed by a safety talk from a fire official. Then each

group will go to one of five assigned spots along Foss Creek, all within walking distance from the Community Center.

An assigned team leader will help oversee the process and, wearing gloves and using litter pick-up grabbers, volunteers will spend approximately two hours gathering trash of every description and placing it into trash bags. About 75 people participate each year, so teams are usually between 12-20 in size.

At approximately 11am, each group will place their bags into the back of trucks, to be transported to a large dumpster, which will later be picked up by Recology.

Volunteers return to the Community Center to eat lunch (provided by Healdsburg Kiwanis) and

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