



VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL LEAGUE
1642 State Farm Blvd., Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-977-8475 / 434-977-5943 fax / www.vhsl.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JUNE 3, 2014

Contact: Mike McCall
mmccall@vhsl.org

VHSL ADOPTS FILM FESTIVAL AS NEWEST STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

Richmond to host inaugural festival in May 2015

CHARLOTTESVILLE—The Virginia High School League has adopted film festival as its first, all-new academic state championship since 1998 (Scholastic Bowl), ushering its programs into its next 100 years by embracing the Digital Age.

Eligible public high school students from 314 member schools across Virginia will now have an opportunity to submit narratives, documentaries, animations, experimentals and/or commercial/PSAs to this juried festival set to take place May 29-30, 2015 in Richmond.

“Digital cameras are so pervasive in today’s society because they come with every smartphone and are so affordable,” said Lisa Giles, VHSL Director of Activities. “Almost every student has one, and almost every student is already experimenting with amateur filmmaking. What we aim to do with our festival is encourage participation, support filmmaking education, and recognize student achievement in filmmaking.”

The VHSL is the third state association in the National Federation of State High School Associations to offer film festival as a state championship. The Iowa High School Speech Association and Texas University Interscholastic League also offer festivals. In designing the parameters for its festival, the VHSL consulted IHSSA and Texas UIL to obtain a state association perspective, but also considered industry festivals as a model.

“We wanted our students to have as authentic of an industry experience as possible,” said Giles. “So, we also looked at what Sundance, Tribeca and even RIFF (Richmond International Film Festival) were doing.”

Active high school film educators Michelle Gary (Patrick Henry High School, Ashland), Alan Weintraut (Annandale High School, Annandale), and Randy West (Meadowbrook High School, Chesterfield) were also part of fine tuning the rules and procedures.

All submitted films will be viewed and evaluated. Eight films per category will be named Official Selections for a total of 40 films to be screened at the VHSL Film Festival where they will be ranked by a grand jury. The highest ranking film per category will be named Best Picture, the equivalent of the state champion. Also, the film with the highest number of audience votes at the VHSL Film Festival live screening will be declared the winner of the Audience Choice Award in its respective category.

“Most people don’t realize all of the work that goes into making a complete film from concept to digital editing, so our festival will include an educational component in addition to screenings,” said Giles. “Each segment will consist of a discussion panel or workshop along with a student filmmaker Q&A.”

The VHSL Film Festival supports the Virginia Department of Education’s Career and Technology curriculum in Television and Media Production, and the International Baccalaureate’s Film Curriculum.

“These programs already exist in our schools, and are also a great way for students to meet the Virginia SOL requirement for media literacy,” said Giles. “Our event is the perfect complement.”

Filmmakers, university film school educators, and other industry professionals will serve as workshop speakers/panelists, Q&A moderators, jurors, and awards presenters. The Virginia Film Office (VFO) and Virginia Production Alliance (VPA) are also strategic partners of the VHSL Film Festival.

“We are committed to developing the [filmmaker] workforce, and a competition such as this one will help to give young people the kind of experience they need to consider a career in film production,” said Mary Nelson, VFO Deputy Director.

“I am so enthusiastic about a statewide student film competition in Virginia,” said Heather Waters, VPA President and RIFF founder/producer. “I know how important it is to provide our Virginia filmmakers, actors and crew with opportunities to grow. This applies to the newest members of the community as well as the veterans.”

For more information about the VHSL Film Festival, please contact Lisa Giles, VHSL Director of Activities and Student Services at lgiles@vhs.org or 434.977.8475.

About VHSL: An alliance of Virginia’s public high schools, the 314 member schools of the VHSL serve the Commonwealth’s youth by establishing and maintaining standards for student activities and competitions that promote education, leadership, sportsmanship, character and citizenship. Nearly 200,000 students participate in 28 different sports and 11 academic activities, culminating in over 155 state championships each year.

Founded in 1913, the VHSL is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization.

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