

# The discreet charm of Yorkton

by Linda Kupecek

The 19th Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival (Nov. 2 - 6, 1983) maintained its tradition of conviviality amid a parade of this country's current short productions.

Yorkton, a two-hour drive northeast from Regina, may seem an unlikely host for the oldest continuous short film festival in North America, but its lack of geographic accessibility is redeemed by the graciousness, good humour, and professionalism of the Festival organizers.

Sheila Harris, executive secretary of the Festival, heads an enthusiastic crowd of volunteers who devote considerable energy and warmth to their assignments. A veterinarian, a funeral director, a cable television operator, an apiarist and other local professionals devote many hours to Festival duties... from tedious office time to driving the bleary-eyed adjudicators to screenings. The result: Yorkton remains on the map as a national festival.

The adjudication experience began with a somewhat ominous mode of transport from Regina to Yorkton. Funeral director Allan Bailey, ex-mayor of Yorkton and one of the most prominent (and charming) directors of the board, drove the innocent quintet of adjudicators on a loquacious tour in a tastefully subdued limo bearing the title "Bailey's".

In contrast, no camera could record the emotions which zig-zagged across one adjudicator's face when he learned that specially constructed Hallowe'en costumes awaited us in readiness for the 'Meet the Judges' dance. But when we emerged from our hotel rooms dressed as the Lone Ranger, a French maid, a can-can girl, etc., we blended in with the ambience: colorfully clad square-dancers who were holding a convention at the Corona Motor Hotel. The Yorkton hosts wine and dine their guests mercilessly, crowding parties, cabarets, dinners and dances in between screenings. No wonder "small but fun" is the word on the grapevine about Yorkton.

But the work itself is over 32 hours of screenings of short films and videos from across Canada, culled from the 117 entries by the pre-selection committee. This was a rare opportunity to view a wide range of Canadian material: much fine documentary work; some admirable drama; a few truly funny and fresh comedies, one an outrageous treat from Newfoundland, another a



● Festival directors Bill Johnston and Lawrence Pearson with filmmaker Karl Hillzinger



● Celebrity guest Don Francks with Yorkton chamber of commerce president Ron Balacho



● Jury member Linda Kupecek with Manitoba filmmaker Allan Kroeker

cunning little love tale from Montreal; a hilariously inventive commercial from Canada Customs; a number of moving anti-war pieces (signs of the times?); many (perhaps too many) scenes of skinning and cleaning of fish and pelts; and much examination of Canadians by Canadians. (Needless to say, not all the work was exquisite. Some items sent the hapless viewing victims reeling for coffee, or raising wild eyes to heaven with the anguished question "WHY?" and "Where on earth did they find the money for this?") But, above all, the screenings were an affirmation of the first-class work being produced by Canadians, and, notably this year, by independents.

In addition to the public screenings and the awards ceremony on Nov. 5, the Festival featured some added attractions: Don Francks was the celebrity guest. Peter Pearson of the CFDC flew in to talk about the famous \$35 million. Ed Richardson and Patricia Mahon of Superchannel each presented workshops. Charles Samu of New York presented several international animation programs.

But, despite the Festival's track record, organizers lament that national press coverage has been limited. This year, Harris scored a major coup with a substantial spot on the CBC's *Journal*, but she is puzzled by the apparent lack of interest in what gives her and her Yorkton volunteers an appreciable and justifiable pride: an all-Canadian festival, the oldest continuous short festival in North America, in the middle of the Saskatchewan prairie.

## 19th Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival

### Adjudicators

- John Fisher, president of New Cinema Limited, Criterion Pictures, and Visual Education Centre, Toronto.
- Patricia Mahon, script consultant with Superchannel, Edmonton.
- Linda Kupecek, actor-writer, Calgary.
- Gordon Langille, vice-president, Avenue Television and Telecommunications, Toronto.
- Vladimir Valenta, writer-producer-actor, Edmonton.

Linda Kupecek is an actress-writer in Calgary.