



# UNITED ARTS MEDIA GROUP

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

1001 STATE STREET • SUITE 1400 • ERIE, PA 16501 • 814-873-5069  
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First, I want to apologize for what you will soon find out is a post that is far, far too long. However, there was just so much to say, and so many to mention that it was just impossible to make it any shorter, unfortunately. The good news is that it is far shorter than it could have been.

It has been 20 years now since I co-founded the Great Lakes International Film Festival, and though in that time there have been many trials to pass and hurdles to overcome, I take great pride in seeing the Festival still flourishing and moving forward despite the adversity.

Still, no man walks alone!

What I carry with me from day to day is not the unavoidable hardships, but the joys, successes, and friendships built along the way.

I would like to take this opportunity to commemorate the GLIFF's 20th Anniversary, not with any lavish party, but with a much more heart-felt celebration of so very many people without whom our Festival would not have been able to continue. While these people's numbers are far too great to mention individually, still there are some very special names that I would like to recognize as having been invaluable to the Festival's success.

The first person who stands out would be a tremendous human who in our first year lent our organization his faith and support, and in the following years did so much to further the success of the Festival, including organizing our first fundraiser in 2003 that he dubbed "Movie Music". To Mr. Jim Welle I would like to extend my deepest, most heartfelt THANK YOU for everything that you contributed to the Great Lakes Film Fest, especially your time, your great talent, but most of all your never-ending support and devotion. Believe me, as it did then, still today it means the world to me! Thank you so much!!!

Next, I would like to honor a great man who many revere as such, and who was dubbed the "Dolly Lama Of State Street" by the Erie Times-News Showcase, but more importantly, a man who knows the true meaning of "the right thing", Mr. Bob Nelson. In 2003 Bob was so gracious as to allow us the opportunity to host our first in a long line of fundraiser events in his most amazing establishment, the Dockside Tavern, the best bar ever to sell a beer in Erie.

Over the years Bob continued to support the Festival so much so that he honored us by becoming a member of our B.O.D. some time ago. No words can ever express the gratitude, respect, and pride to have had the unique opportunity to produce so many shows and events with him, but much more importantly, to actually be able to call such an AMAZING man my friend. Mr. Nelson, Sir, I wish you the same as you always offered to me, the very best of everything, along with peace, love, joy, and happiness all the days of your life!!!! Thank you for being you!!!!

Before I go any further I need to make a very special mention of a man who is definitely one of the greatest supporters of our Festival, and truly a phenomenal person of the highest caliber, Mr. Don Grise, owner of Grise Audio Visual. Without your support and the unbelievable generosity, that you showed to both me and the Festival over the years with the donation of so many countless dollars of equipment, without which we never could have produced our events, shows, and fundraisers, and consequently, the Festival may not even exist today, and you will never know how very much I appreciate you! THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH, I LOVE YOU MAN!!!!



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I would also like to thank somebody who signed on as a volunteer our first year and has proven to be an invaluable member of not only the Festival team, but to the entire organization as a whole, Mr. Frank Leczner, Jr. Frank has not only been somebody who the Festival could always count on no matter what, but also somebody that I personally could depend on for just about anything over the years, and honestly such an amazing friend! Thank you Frank for always being there!!!

I would also like to give a very special shout out to some truly incredible people like Ed Coleman of Coleman & Associates, the best damn accounting firm ever to punch a number on a calculator in Erie Pa; Keith Redie, the best Tech man that I have worked with who saved my ass many times at shows, a tremendous person and an outstanding friend; Mr. Greg Ropp who lent us tremendous support in our early years as a founding B.O.D. member, and a person without whom the founding of our Organization's Eerie Horror Fest in 2004 may not have been possible; the countless volunteers, sponsors, and supporters over the years, especially the Erie Community who each year has continued to religiously attend our Festival events, we couldn't be here without you!; The very many venues, bars, and restaurants that have allowed us the honor of hosting our events in their establishments that are too numerous to mention individually; most importantly, I would like to send my deepest thank you out to the thousands upon thousands of Filmmakers who every single year support our Festival by submitting their treasured films to our event, many of whom have come back year after year with new works to entrust us with. The support, faith, and respect that you all have shown our Festival has meant so much to me and everyone at GLIFF that you could never know! Thank you so much! Please know that like you, we all do this for the LOVE OF FILM!!!!

I would also like to mention the countless artists, musicians, and bands that have supported us over the years, you all are truly AMAZING!!! Especially though, I would like to single out just a few without whom our Festival may not have made it past 2003. First, Mr. John Johnston and his very lovely wife Gina, both of whom supported us through their incredible musical performances with bands such as the Telefonics, Canadian Friday, and others, thank you guys so much for your support and contributions, It meant the world to me! I'd also like to mention a few other bands like Black Rose Diary, Johnny James and the Absolutes, Professor Small and so many more that I can't even begin to list, thank you all so very much!! As for Artists, though there are so many, I feel the need to mention one in particular, Mr. Fran Schanz who is most likely the greatest Artist in the history of Erie, but definitely, one of the greatest men to ever walk the earth, thank you so much for honoring our Organization and me with your support and friendship all these years!!!!

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to and honor a man who was one of our first special guests in 2002, Mr. Otto Felix. Among his many talents and achievements, Otto was an accomplished Actor, Producer, and Screenwriter. Additionally, Otto authored several books of poems, still photographs, and drawings. He was a truly creative man, and an amazing person, along with having been a great friend to our Festival over the years. On 13 December 2008, Otto passed on unexpectedly, and I want everyone who reads this to know that Otto Felix was a man among men, and he will always be remembered and never forgotten, and most especially, loved!! Thank you Otto for being there for us, I really appreciate it!!!!

A very special shout-out is needed here for a truly tremendous person, an amazing musical artist who has just been booked to play an upcoming event for our Organization, Aria Alexander of Aria and the Voiceless. I want to thank you very much for taking the time out of your incredible schedule to play for us, I truly appreciate it!!!!



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I could go on and on with the never-ending list of people to thank, but this post is already far too long. What I will do though, is to mention a very important person without whom I know in my heart and in my soul that this Festival and this Organization would not even exist right now, and would have never gotten past its first year. So sadly and regretfully, I can't mention her name because I know that it would definitely embarrass her to no end for me to do so, but I soooo want to!!!!

Every single person that I know, except for Mr. Jim Welle, I only know because she introduced me to them, or somebody that she introduced me to, introduced me to them, and so on, and so forth. She was with me from day one when I started this thing as a volunteer and helped me every step of the way from that point on, and I absolutely could not have done it without her!!!!

She is truly and without doubt the most trustworthy, caring, amazing person that I have ever met, a person with the biggest heart, and the most tremendous soul, and most absolutely the best of everything that is good and honest, and beautiful in this world, and I honestly would be lost without her because she always kept me honest, lead me down the path of goodness, and simply put, made me a better human than I ever thought I could be!!!! All of this gave me the strength to keep moving forward, even when I thought that it was just impossible. If she ever reads this, I know that she will know that I'm talking about her, still as I write this it brings a sadness to my heart that of all the people that I have mentioned in this post, hers is the one name that I would like to mention the most, yet I cannot out of respect.

I would like to close with this simple statement, to everyone that I have mentioned here in this post. Thank you all so very much for everything! I will always carry you in my heart and my mind for all the days of my life. I sincerely respect, honor, treasure, and love you all, and I always will.

I'd like to end with a quote in the opening presentation of a song that embodies something that I try to live by, I hope that you all like it! I won't recite the quote, the video does it far better than I ever could.

Thank you all once again!!!

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President  
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