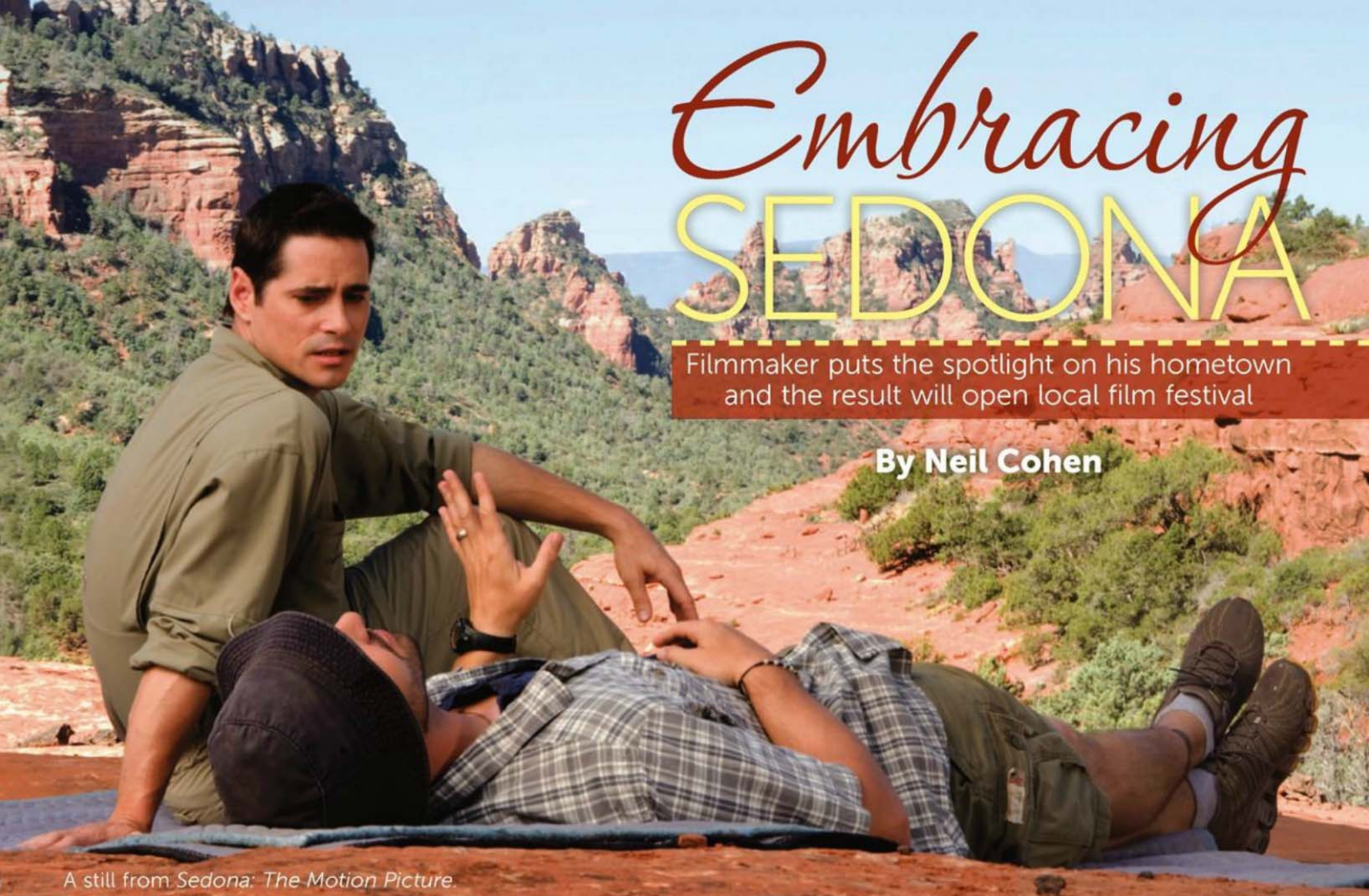


Embracing SEDONA

Filmmaker puts the spotlight on his hometown and the result will open local film festival

By Neil Cohen



A still from *Sedona: The Motion Picture*.

After years of being embraced by the community of Sedona, director Tommy Stovall and his partner of 15 years, Marc Sterling, figured it was about time to return the favor.

Their film, *Sedona: The Motion Picture*, will have its world premiere on the Feb. 19 as the opening night film at the Sedona International Film Festival. It will also have two other screenings during the nine-day festival.

Patrick Schweiss, the festival's artistic director said the film is the single-most talked about movie in town. "The whole town is turning out for it," he joked.

Originally from Dallas, Stovall and Sterling fell in love with Red Rock Country and they are raising their son Trevor in the arty community.

After finishing 2005's thriller *Hate Crime*, the men began thinking about their next project. They decided there was plenty of material close to home.

"For a long time, we've been wanting to get the film industry going up here, Stovall

said during a telephone interview. "It's been hard because of the economy, but we're hoping that this is the start of things to come. In Sedona, everybody has their story."

Stovall said he originally thought that a *Northern Exposure*-type TV show based in Sedona would have potential, but a film seemed more manageable.

"I started thinking, what would happen if this woman got stuck in Sedona and couldn't get out," he said during a telephone interview. "I wanted to do something totally different from *Hate Crime*. This is more of a comedy drama."

The film tells the intersecting stories of people who converge on Sedona for different reasons. Frances Fisher (*Titanic*) plays a driven woman who finds herself trapped in town after a car accident or, rather, a car/airplane accident.

While she waits, she reluctantly starts meeting people, including Beth Grant (*Sordid Lives*), a cosmic spiritual type, and Christopher Atkins (*The Blue Lagoon*), as a friendly coffee shop owner.

Seth Peterson, who was the lead in *Hate*

Crime, plays a gay dad who is too consumed by work to pay attention to his family. When one of his children (played by Stovall and Sterling's son) wanders away, he changes his priorities.

Stovall said the subplot was not based on a real-life experience. "The character is this kid in a fantasy world out on the trail and he gets lost, but he doesn't really know that he's lost, Stovall said. "Really, that storyline is about a father who realizes what's important in life. He's been worried all the time and stressed out because he feels responsible for taking care of his family and making money."

"With *Hate Crime*, homophobia and the couple's sexual orientation was a big part of the film," Stovall said. "But in this movie, the gay issue isn't even mentioned. They just happen to be gay. As a filmmaker, that's been one of my goals."

Comedienne Lin Shaye (*There's Something About Mary*), Barry Corbin (*Northern Exposure*) and Robert Shields (Half of the mime team Shields and Yarnell) round out the cast.

LGBT FILMS AT THE SEDONA FILM FESTIVAL

Sasha: A German film about a boy confronted with the prejudice of his homophobic immigrant family as he struggles with his urge to come out.

Screening at 9:20 p.m. Feb. 22 and 3:30 p.m. Feb. 25.

A Marine Story: Drea Weber plays a decorated Marine who returns to her California hometown after her career is cut short by Don't Ask Don't Tell.

Preceded by the lesbian-themed short film **The Archivist**.

Screening at 6:20 p.m. Feb. 22 and 12:20 p.m. Feb. 24.

The Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls: A documentary from New Zealand about comedic, country singing, dancing and yodeling lesbian twin sisters.

Screening at 12:30 p.m. Feb. 23 and 9:30 p.m. Feb. 26.

Two Spirits: A documentary about Fred Martinez, a Navajo boy who identified as a girl who was murdered. The film explores a mother's loss with a look at Native American cultures that held places of honor for people of integrated genders.

A still from *Sascha*.



Preceded by the short film **Overture**, which features a transgender character. It's directed and written by Jake Kramer, a student at Zaki Gordon Film Institute in Sedona.

Screening at 9 p.m. Feb. 25 and 3 p.m. Feb. 26.

Stovall said Lin Shay's character is based on a Sedona figure called Crazy Mary. Shay came up with the idea of calling herself Claire de Loon.

Atkins plays sort of a love interest for Frances' character. "He really surprised me, because he hasn't done many comedies, but he's really funny," Stovall said. "Even between takes he had everyone cracking up." **-E**

Sedona: The Motion Picture will be screened at 7 p.m. Feb. 19, 5 p.m. Feb. 21 and 9:10 p.m. Feb. 27.

VITAL STATISTICS

Sedona International Film Festival

Feb. 19-27

Harkins Sedona 6 Theaters, the Sedona Performing Arts Center and Sedona Rouge Resort

Tickets: \$12 per screening, ticket packages are available www.sedonafilmfestival.com

OTHER SEDONA FILM FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

► **Exporting Raymond**, by Phil Rosenthal, creator of the *Everybody Loves Raymond*, tells the story about how he was hired to create a version of the TV show in Russia.

► **Thanks**, directed by Martin Bergman and starring Rita Rudner and Paul Dooley, follows a California couple over three Thanksgivings as they struggle with changes and the effects of the bleak economy. Unlike her stand-up persona, Rudner plays a serious role.

► **Nicolas Cage** will screen his directorial debut, 2002's *Sonny*, starring James Franco as a recently discharged soldier who comes home to New Orleans where his mother (Brenda Blethyn) goads him into a life a hustler.

► **Seven Brides for Seven Brothers**, the 1954 classic filmed in Arizona, will be presented by Turner Classic Movie's Robert Osborne and one of the film's stars, Jane Powell.



A still from *Thanks*.

► **Seminar** topics include cinematography, getting your film to market and filmmaking in China, featuring the head of the Beijing Film Academy.

► Classic comedian **Jonathan Winters** will receive the festival's Lifetime Achievement Award.

► **Stars** expected to be in attendance include Cage, Rudner, Gary Sinise, Rip Torn and Frances Fisher.