

# VAIL FILM FESTIVAL 2005

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## Vail Daily

### Opportunity arises at the Vail Film Festival

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VAIL — Aspiring filmmakers, you have five minutes to pitch your idea to eager producers. Go.

The Vail Film Festival is offering a Screenwriting Program, a film-industry clinic Saturday that features a screenwriting class, producers panel and pitch sessions. Attendees have the opportunity to pitch their movie idea for five minutes to a producer that is actively seeking new material.

The Screenwriting Program is spearheaded by Darren Foster and Cheryl Whitney of the Colorado Actors Screenwriter Assembly (CASA) in Denver. CASA is a film community that provides cold-reading sessions, writing groups and an online message board posting movie auditions.

"We have set up the Screenwriting Program to market to screenwriters and independent filmmakers. We've added a new Pitching Pass for \$45, which is just the afternoon producer panel and one pitch. So if you don't want to take the class, you don't have to," Foster said.

#### Learning to write

Foster signed on Larry Stouffer, a personal friend of his, to teach "Screenwriting - The Art and the Craft." Stouffer is the founder of The Screenwriting Conference in Santa Fe ([www.scsfe.com](http://www.scsfe.com)), one of the most successful screenwriting conferences in the nation which is celebrating its seventh year this coming June.

"The art of writing is how you build your story, character development, what grabs the people who are reading it. Craft is the structure, the formatting, the technical aspects. There is a standard look and format to a screenplay, and if it doesn't follow the standard look and layout, it says beginner all over it," Foster said, who will also run the digital theaters during the festival. The intention is for attendees to leave the class with a better understanding of the world of screenwriting and what it takes to succeed in it.

#### Roundtable of experts

Following the class is the Producers Panel on Pitching, featuring producers Holly Becker ("Camp," "Happy Here and Now," "This So-Called Disaster," "Trouble With Men and Women"), Jeremy Coon ("Napoleon Dynamite"), Heather Hale ("The Courage to Love," "The Evidence," "Lifestyle Magazine"), Adam Kassen ("Faking It" "Wife Swap") and Kate McCallum ("Law & Order," "Crime Story," "Miami Vice," "Gimme a Break" and "Charles In Charge"). The discussion is designed to help attendees with their pitches. Coon is the only one on the panel that will not receive pitches.

"Please, no one ask, 'How do I get an agent?' Let me get through one film festival without someone asking that. I think in a panel environment, when you have brought together people who might not even know one another and who come from various angles of the industry, and there's not a planned curriculum, you're best served to get insights: Where do they agree? Where do they disagree?," Hale of Storyworks Entertainment said. "These people have their pulse on the finger of the industry, they've had their teeth knocked out in the trenches, they've lucked out and they know it - I think the kind of advice you'd want is knowing what we all know now, what would we have done differently."

#### And here's the pitch

Exposing your movie idea to the movers and shakers of the industry is one of the harder things to do, said Foster, especially while living in Colorado. Pitching is part interview and part selling your concept.

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One five-minute pitch is included in the \$60 Screenwriting Program pass or you can buy a \$45 pitching pass which includes the panel and one five-minute pitch. Festival-goers can buy an additional pitch session for \$25 and match them back to back for a 10-minute session. But, Foster warns, if you can't pitch your idea in five minutes, there's something inherently wrong with your pitch plan.

"Think about it this way, if you watch an advertisement on TV for a movie, it's only 30 seconds. You should be able to tell your story in the same way. I recommend having more than one idea, so if they don't like the first you can pitch a second or third. I've had that happen to me several times," Foster said.

Hale said confidence is the key to conviction. Make eye contact, engage the producer, build rapport, enroll their curiosity and emotions with your "hook," she said.

"Keep it moving, strive for clarity, try to have your pitch match the genre of your project. Comedies should have me smiling, maybe even laughing, I should be worried about your protagonist in a horror or thriller. Keep me guessing and wanting more as you unfold the story verbally in front of me so I can see it in on the screen in my mind's eye. Try to emulate the energy and enthusiasm that would naturally be part of sharing the blow-by-blow plot points and highlights of a great movie you just saw to a good friend," said Hale.

To calm the nerves of screenwriters and filmmakers, Vail Film Festival is providing a Pitching Hospitality Room, an area for those who are pitching to hang out and relax. Foster and others, like Coon, will be on hand in the room to give hints.

"That really helps you prepare for pitches. People get pretty nervous the first time they pitch," said Foster.

For more information on the Vail Film Festival or to buy tickets for the Screenwriters Program, log on to [www.vailfilmfestival.org](http://www.vailfilmfestival.org).