



Fontana Unified School District

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NEWS RELEASE

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Inaugural Fontana Unified Film Festival Showcases Emerging K-12 Storytellers

FONTANA, CA – In front of a packed house of family and friends cheering on their favorite hometown celebrities, Fontana Unified rolled out the red carpet and trained the spotlight on its emerging K-12 student storytellers during the inaugural Fontana Film Festival, held May 5 at Steelworkers Auditorium.

Curated from more than 130 student videos submitted from across the District, the Film Festival showcased the diverse talent and technical skills acquired in Fontana Unified's TV and video production programs. Students from Summit, Jurupa Hills and A.B. Miller high schools, along with students from Southridge Tech Middle School and Almond Elementary School, competed for statuettes that resembled tiny Oscars.

"The Film Festival was the culmination of an eventful and exciting year for our TV production students," Summit High teacher and Film Festival organizer Artie Casas said. "I'd like to thank my colleagues and their students for their enthusiasm and support. We hope to make this an annual event for many years to come."

A.B. Miller High senior Jacob Leal won the award for Best High School Comedy for his stop-motion animation send-up of DC Comics superheroes, "Spider in Gotham," made entirely with Legos. Leal was also a finalist in the Best High School Avant Garde category for "First Draft Production," a documentary on the making of "Spider in Gotham."

Leal is a four-year member of A.B. Miller's TV Production pathway. He made his first stop-motion film while attending Wayne Ruble Middle School and has studied under both former A.B. Miller TV Production teacher Leo Rivas and current teacher Cruz Jimenez. Leal plans to attend Cal State Northridge and study film, with an eye toward mastering behind-the-scenes skills in set design and prop design.

"It's amazing to win the award. I really didn't think that I would because the field was so strong," Leal said. "I want to thank my teachers, Mr. Rivas and Mr. Jimenez. I've learned so much in four years, especially using Adobe software editing programs like Photoshop and Premiere Pro."

The Film Festival was hosted by Rivas, who was named Fontana Unified 2021-22 Teacher of the Year and a 2023 San Bernardino County Teacher of the Year before departing to work for the AIDS Healthcare Foundation. In 2013, Rivas established the A.B. Miller Film Festival, which was staged every year until Rivas retired from the District.

“I started the festival at A.B. Miller so that students could show their work to their parents and friends. Later, we expanded it to include other schools,” Rivas said. “It’s great to see the tradition continue at this level, and it’s an honor to come back and host the festival. Seeing my former students and colleagues brings back great memories, and the films are wonderful.”

Festival categories were open to all K-12 students throughout the District and ran the gamut from live action drama to music videos, news features to avant-garde, sports video to TikTok. There was even an award for Best Alumni video.

Student submissions ranged from playful to celebratory to introspective. Though the mood in the auditorium was festive, some of the videos tackled tough subject matter like loneliness, despair and intervention. Southridge Tech Middle School students submitted films centered on eating disorders, racism, stereotyping and vaping.

“Although Southridge Tech does not have a film production class at present, our students worked in teams with their social studies teachers to develop short films that explore issues that matter to middle schoolers, and offers their unique perspectives and ideas for positive change,” Southridge Tech Principal Dr. Roy Rogers said. “We are looking to develop a film production program to align with the CTE programs at Kaiser and Jurupa Hills this upcoming year.”

Almond Elementary School students were well represented, showing the skills they have acquired in their Pacer Production Studios program. Almond fourth-grade students Logan Berumen and Ethan Hernandez wowed the crowd with their winning TikTok video “Mike Myers,” which offered a hilarious take on the legendary “Halloween” super-villain.

“It was a fantastic night for our Pacers,” Almond Principal Tim McCaffery said. “It was a real thrill for our scholars to see their work on the big screen and experience what it’s like to tell a story that resonates with others.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_FILMFEST1: A.B. Miller High School senior Jacob Leal won the award for Best High School Comedy for his stop-motion animated film “Spider in Gotham” at the inaugural Fontana Film Festival, held May 5. In his four years as an A.B. Miller High TV Production student, Leal worked with former FUSD Teacher of the Year Leo Rivas (on left) and current teacher, Cruz Jimenez (on right).

FUSD_FILMFEST2: Young award-winning filmmakers from across the District show off their trophies at the conclusion of the inaugural Fontana Film Festival, held May 5 at Steelworkers Auditorium. The film festival was open to all students in the District and included submissions from high school, middle school and elementary school students, as well as FUSD alumni.

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