



WIFV NEWS

September 2012 Members in the News Edited by Flo Dwek



Abner Galvanizes Local Talent

Allison Abner has had her foot in both Hollywood and Washington since writing on the TV series, *The West Wing*. After writing on two Emmy-winning seasons of the show and going on to write and produce on the Bruckheimer hit series

Without a Trace, she transplanted to Washington and continued to develop pilots for Fox and ABC. This season, Abner wrote an episode of TV's highest-rated show, *NCIS*, and is in development with Fremantle Media (*American Idol*) on another project. As the featured speaker at the WIFV Screenwriters' Roundtable several months ago, Abner challenged writers and WIFV to mine local talent to produce content and use the Web as an alternative platform. Just a few months later--thanks to WIFV Executive Director Melissa Houghton, board member Monica Lee Bellais, Interface Media's Joel Westbrook and Abner herself - the WIFV Web series incubator was created and launched. Their efforts have continued to prosper with the addition of other experienced professionals, including Robert Ausura. Abner served as a writing mentor on the project, along with Bellais. "I am committed," she says, to helping WIFV bring in significant partners as we start up a new mini-industry here in DC that is sure to expand." *For more information, contact Abner at aabner@gmail.com*

Bellais in DC and LA

Producer/Screenwriter Monica Lee Bellais, a WIFV board member, has been instrumental in program planning for the WIFTI Summit, scheduled for November 30-



December 2. Bellais is a mentor for WIFV's Web series pilot, *Lunatic Fringe*. This exciting project showcases experienced WIFV talent and also mentors up-and-coming talent. Bellais just completed post-production on the documentary, *The Lighthouse Lady*, to screen at film festivals later this year. She is also producing a documentary featuring female soldiers in combat zones. In another effort, Bellais has teamed up to develop an exciting pop-culture/comic book series with Miguel Cima, award-winning filmmaker of *Dig Comics*, David Uslan, Executive Producer, and Aaron Feuer, Associate Producer of National Geographic's documentary, *Valentine's Day Massacre*. On the screenwriting front, she has been working with Michael Uslan, Executive Producer of *The Dark Knight Rises*, on the development of her screenplay, *Ocotillo*. Bellais divides her time between DC and Los Angeles, where she worked for James Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment. She is a member of SAG-AFTRA, the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, and a judge for the CINE Awards. *For more information, contact Bellais at monicaleebellais@gmail.com*

Title: Director, Screenwriter, Storyteller

Ausura: Producing Fringe

Robert Ausura has been writing media scripts long enough to have done more than 500 of them, including 22 for award-winning productions. A part-time producer for corporate and government clients, he is now the



volunteer producer of WIFV's first Web series pilot, *Lunatic Fringe*--a madcap comedy set in a DC hair salon--which he describes as "aptly named." On the paying side of his professional life, Ausura continues to write for a growing cadre of corporate, government and nonprofit clients, while creating screenplays and building his commercial and fine art photography business. Visit his website at www.robertwriting.com or www.ausuraphotography.com.

Willis Named Screenwriting Finalist



Kudos to screenwriter Heidi Willis, on a stellar, breakout year. "My years of self training and academic work in screenwriting are apparently paying off," she says. Her script, *What Are Mothers For*, is a finalist in the 2012 SoCal Film Festival screenwriting competition (winner announced Sept 28th) and her short script,

Haunted House Hunters, is a finalist in the 2012 DC Shorts Film Festival screenwriting competition. The DC Shorts competition live reading and winner selection will be held September 14th at Atlas Performing Arts Center. For the past six months, Willis has also been working with WIFV colleague, Maureen Offutt, on the comedy Web series, *Lunatic Fringe* --the first Web series project produced by WIFV through lots of volunteer efforts! To learn more, contact Willis at writingbyheidi@gmail.com

WIFV is delighted to be working with so many



When asked what he does, Andre says, "I tell stories with actors in front of a camera." One of the most complete filmmakers working today, he understands story--what makes a good story, and how its ebb and flow affects an audience. He also understands acting--how to help actors bring dynamic, fully realized characters vividly to life--transforming individual

artists into a seamless ensemble. And he understands how to shape the story and direct his actors, in concert with all of the technical and pictorial elements of filmmaking, to create a dynamic visual experience that both engages and entertains. A former assistant to Academy Award-winning director Barry Levinson, Andre's upcoming directing projects include his new screenplay, *Dark Yearning*, a psychological thriller; a new reality Web Series for FaceTrueLove.Com; a TV commercial for the National Association of Enrolled Agents (NAEA); and a new stage play he is both writing and directing. For more information, contact him at atittle@gmail.com

Offutt Gives Thanks for Rare Gift

Maureen Offutt and Heidi Willis are the creators and co-writers of the new Web pilot, *Lunatic Fringe*. Maureen recently completed her first short film, *What it Costs to Quit Your Job* and is currently editing her screenplay, *Heard*, about a rape victim who takes extreme measures to shed light on this heinous crime. Offutt is also working on her play *Answers Without Words*, about a family's tragedies and the struggles they face trying to work through them. Offutt says the most rewarding project for her came in the form of "the



fabulous WIFV Members volunteering their time to the Pipeline of Pilots Project. Questions? Email director@wifv.org

rare and wonderful gift I was given to work on *Lunatic Fringe* with some of the industry's most talented people--my writing partner, Heidi Willis, and our mentors, Alison Abner and Monica Lee Bellais." She truly appreciates their generosity in sharing such a wealth of experience. For more information, contact Offutt at sassymo@aol.com or at 703-901-0321.



Shapiro Finishes Short Drama

After a long journey from script to screen, Rachell Shapiro has recently completed her independent dramatic short film, *From Hell to Here*. The film takes an abstract look at an aging veteran battling Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The film stars newcomer and Vietnam veteran Robert L. Mitchell and seasoned stage actor Matt Bassett. After a successful Indiegogo campaign this past fall to raise funds for production, the film was shot on location at Seneca Creek State Park, a beautiful backdrop for the dramatic and powerful story. The

mission of the film is to be a springboard for dialogue and discussion about the invisible wounds of war in universities, communities, homes and counseling centers. Rachell is currently working on a companion discussion guide with Veterans Administration Psychologist Dr. John Mundt based in Chicago. The discussion guide is uniquely designed for educators, clinicians, and veterans. To find out more about *From Hell to Here* go to the film's FB page - www.Facebook.com/helltohere or visit the website www.FromHelltoHereFilm.com.

Buchdahl Magazine



Hannah Buchdahl's alter-ego, "Mainstream the September issue of *O - The Oprah* included a shout-out to the movie-review blog created with two other chicks, "Arty" in "Adventurous" in New York. She says "it's maintain the site while juggling 'real freelances for *America's Most Wanted*", but inspired the chicks to keep it going--at least through Oscar season! Contact Hannah at hannahbuch@mac.com

Mentioned in O



Chick," got a mention in *Magazine*. The magazine Chickflix.net that Buchdahl Asheville and been a real challenge to jobs"(Buchdahl currently the unexpected plug has



Whitman Interviewed in *Washington Blade*

Hats off to Lee Whitman for his compellingly candid interview in *The Washington Blade* (Joey DiGuglielmo, Sept. 6, 2012). Take a peek at the story to learn more about this 29-year-old's impressive filmmaking career and his views on everything from the happening scene in DC to family values and coming out. Whitman's first feature film, *War Stories*, now out on DVD, "tells the story of a kid named Tim who grew up believing his father was killed in the Gulf War but discovers he may still be alive." He calls his next film, *20 Days and Counting*, with an LGBT focus, a "relationship thriller." In addition to feature films, this DOD writer/producer (via contract) by day also makes shorts

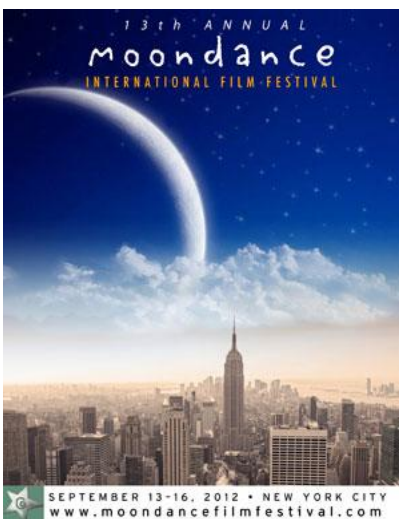
and has a few things up his sleeve on YouTube (check them out under the name aedude01; his personal site is www.uncheckablefilms.com). Whitman is passionate about military families and our veterans. "With veterans there's quite a bit more that we could and should be doing for them when it comes to health care, education, post-military job placement, etc." he says. When asked what he insists upon, Whitman answers with just one word: "integrity." For more information, contact Whitman at lmwhitman@uncheckablefilms.com or at 571-431-2545.

WIFV Members Team Up to Win and Show!

Last September 2011, during the cocktail hour of *An Evening with Geena Davis*, WIFV members Sheri Ratick Stroud and Jane Barbara caught up on what was going on with their various projects. Sheri and her producing partner, Rich West had created Wonder Pictures. In a very short time they completed two shorts, *Spanish Lesson* and *The Last Paper Boy*, and had submitted them to various film festivals. *Spanish Lesson* went on to win the Silver Palm Award at the 2011 Mexico International Film Festival.

Hearing Wonder Pictures was looking for new material to produce a third short film, Jane pitched away as they munched on carrots and dip. Curious, Sheri told Jane to send her a copy of her screenplay, *Suspicious Densities*. The next Monday, Jane got the call. Wonder Pictures was interested and wanted to "take a meeting". The team made a plan: produce a video pitch for a Kickstarter campaign. As the days counted down the film project racked up over 60 supporters and made their goal. Now having the funds needed, Wonder Pictures went to work. They auditioned actors, decided on crew and scouted locations.

When the doctor who seemed interested in letting them use his waiting room backed out - the team



had to scramble to find a house that could hold all their equipment and stand in for a doctor's waiting room. In the end, Jane's basement was transformed into a waiting room, Mammogram room and the shoot was able to proceed.

By May of 2012 the film was completed. Jane suggested Sheri and Rich submit *Suspicious Densities* to the Moondance International Film Festival. Coined the "American Cannes" Jane had already submitted four of her feature-length screenplays, *Love Squared*, *Love on the 7*, *The Sunshine Girls* and *Goodness Knows*. Sheri submitted *Suspicious Densities* and *The Last Paper Boy*.

The results are in from Moondance! Three of Jane's

screenplays are in the semi-finalist category. Jane is the only writer to have four of her projects receive semi-finalist status because *Suspicious Densities* was also chosen as a semi-finalist in the shorts film category. Wonder Pictures, however, had the greatest news of all. Besides *Suspicious Densities - The Last Paper Boy* - was among the winning short films. Sheri and Jane will attend the Festival and report back next month.

WIFV Open House Drew 100 to CDIA-BU on September 5!



WIFV is grateful for the annual support of these companies and our corporate members.

About WIFV

WIFV supports women in the industry by promoting equal opportunities, encouraging professional development, serving as an information network, and educating the public about women's creative and technical achievements.

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