

Editor's Pick

## 20 years of going beyond Normal

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NORMAL – Twenty autumns ago, two ardent fans of art house cinema joined forces to keep the offbeat titles they loved and that were usually ignored by commercial theater chains coming on a regular basis.

The result was Beyond Normal Films, spearheaded by Charline Watts and Colleen Farlee in collaboration with the Normal Theater, then in its second year of operation as a restored town-owned cinema.

The first BNF offering, in October 1996, was “Il Postino,” an instant hit, with patrons lining up around the block for its two showings.

The not-for-profit organization founded by Watts and Farlee has maintained its association with the theater since, recommending independent and foreign films for the Normal’s schedule.

To commemorate the anniversary, one of the hits from the first year of BNF’s existence, “Big Night,” will be screened free for BNF members Tuesday at the Normal.

Among BNF’s offerings are the annual BNF Film showcase, which premiered in 2011 (re-christened the Farlee Film Festival in 2015).

The group also created the Cinema Arts Project, which offers grants to organizations with projects in the cinematic arts. The Cinema Arts Project Fund is administered for BNF by the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation.

The group’s membership was also responsible for raising a portion of the money that resulted in the full-scale sculpture of late film critic Roger Ebert that was unveiled in front of downtown Champaign’s Virginia Theater, site of the annual Roger Ebert’s Film Festival (Ebertfest).

In addition to the films it recommends for showing at the Normal Theater, the group is a co-sponsor of such annual events as the Manhattan Short Film Festival, the Asian Film Festival and five free movies throughout the year for its membership.

Those interested in BNF can contact Farlee at 309-663-1419 or Lynne Chaddon at 309-824-6161.