



Community elders featured in new film

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Learning from our local elders is a big piece of the Culture Vulture Film Festival, where a new film about mountain culture will premiere Friday at Blue Ridge Community College.

“The Land Still Speaks to Us,” the latest film from the Center for Cultural Preservation, features interviews with Henderson County elders on topics from farming and canning to making molasses and moonshine.

“When we go back to the elders, there are so many lessons of value that we can tap,” said David Weintraub, executive director of the Center for Cultural Preservation. “These people are rich and content in their own way — in ways that we can’t fathom easily these days.”

Weintraub is setting out a cultural feast for the eyes and ears as well as the



Filmmaker David Weintraub interviewing Cody Bradford, a fifth generation moonshiner, for "The Land Still Speaks to Us," premiering Friday at the Culture Vulture Film Festival. **Photo by Renato Rotolo.**

stomach in the first Culture Vulture Film Festival, with three documentaries, music from local musician Tom Fisch and barbecue from local eateries for festival guests. Doors will open at 6 p.m. with films screenings starting at 7 p.m.

Panel discussions following each film screening at BRCC’s Thomas Auditorium will explore how to nurture and sustain cultural traditions in our current community.

“I think it will be fascinating to reconnect with important cultural legacies,” said Weintraub, an award-winning filmmaker who directed and produced the festival’s films. “The question is: How do we infuse this history back into our discussion?”

Two of Weintraub’s past films will also be screened at the festival: “Where Neon Goes to Die” and “Golden Side of the Tracks,” about Jewish culture in the South and the African-American community Overtown that

was at one time considered the Harlem of the South.

The films center on communities with vibrant cultures that each faced “tremendous challenges” from outside pressures, Weintraub said. The three films shown together have a total running time of just under two hours.

The Center for Cultural Preservation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving mountain heritage through oral history, documentary film, education and public programs.

Weintraub has interviewed 50 people in 10 Western North Carolina counties for “The Land Still Speaks to Us.” He sees the half-hour documentary as the first in a potential series of films based on oral history interviews with local natives with deep roots in the area.

Funds from the festival are one avenue for supporting the continuing work of the Center for Cultural Preservation, he said.

Local historian and teacher Jennie Jones Giles was instrumental in connecting Weintraub with the elders interviewed in “The Land Still Speaks to Us,” most of whom are from Henderson County.

Giles believes it is essential for younger generations to carry knowledge of what life

was like in the county a few generations ago; she thinks the film is a good vehicle for conveying this history that is in danger of being lost.

“History connects us to ourselves,” Giles said. “We need to be listening more — it would make our lives easier.”

Giles, who will speak as a panelist following the film’s screening, added that she loves listening to how those who grew up here in the early part of the 20th century lived, how they managed to cook and preserve what they harvested from the land without the benefit of electricity.

“Your geography determines everything about your lifestyle,” she said. “The clothing you wear, the crops you grow — by passing on this knowledge, we learn how to live in this geography.”

Those interviewed for “The Land Still Speaks to Us” include many whose families have lived off the land in Henderson County for multiple generations, like Hubert Barnwell, Theron Maybin of the Green River area and Opal Dalton Parkinson of Etowah.

Effie Russell, 89, of Saluda’s Mountain Page community, relates details from a simpler time that demanded more from people. Until two years

ago, Russell was still plowing her land with mules.

“It’s really like a window, a time machine into the soul of Western North Carolina when our communities were much different than they are now,” said Weintraub.

He added that the film does not suggest going back to an archaic way of living but rather suggests that we as communities have lost something in our lives of value that he believes can be reclaimed.

Giles thinks there is a good cross-section of men and women represented in “The Land Still Speaks to Us,” as well as a healthy racial cross-section. “It’s all important, and they all have something to contribute.”

For information and tickets to the Culture Vulture Film Festival, call 828-692-8062 or visit saveculture.org.