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## Preservation Worcester hosts Manhattan Short Film Festival screenings, voting at historic site



Moviegoers, including Herbert and Brenda Dean, watch the finalists in the 2018 Manhattan Short Film Festival in the Fire Alarm & Telegraph Building at Elm Park on Thursday. [Photo/Hallie Blashfield]

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**WORCESTER** — Twenty local filmgoers joined fellow cinema enthusiasts at venues across the globe Thursday to view and vote on nine finalists in the Manhattan Short Film Festival.

The gathering was the first of six screenings being hosted between Sept. 27 and Oct. 6 by Preservation Worcester in the former Fire Alarm & Telegraph Building at 230 Park Ave.

This is the second year the nonprofit has brought the international film festival, which is attended by 100,000 people in 350 cities across six continents, to Central Massachusetts.

Preservation Worcester Executive Director Deborah Packard said that holding the film festival in the organization's event space helps raise money for the organization and exposes the public to the group's historical and cultural preservation work.

"Buildings are part of our culture, as are movies, and we have this beautiful room (the Telegraph Building's Park View Room) that has the capacity to show films in a really nice historic setting," said Packard. "So it's actually a way for us to spread our word to a different audience who might not know of us otherwise."

The Manhattan Short Film Festival accepts films under 20 minutes in any genre. Organizers selected this year's finalists out of 1,565 entries from 73 countries. The final nine films are all shown together at screenings that take place the same week at venues all over the world.

Dorothy Hargrove, vice president of the board of Preservation Worcester, said the Worcester screenings draw a mix of people interested in independent or foreign film, as well as Preservation Worcester members who want to support the organization.

Herbert and Brenda Dean fit both descriptions and attend film events like local film organization [Cinema 320](#)'s screenings of unconventional and highly regarded films at Clark University. The couple said they came to the Manhattan Short Film Festival to view films that are not generally shown by mainstream movie theaters.

"We like getting to see foreign films. Out of the films tonight, only one is American," Herbert Dean said.

Francis De Nicola relished the opportunity to see a collection of short films. "It's remarkable how in eight minutes they can tell a complete story that grabs you and is thought-provoking," he said.

The screening featured a variety of films of different genres and tones. The gruesomely funny American short "Home Shopper," directed by actor Dev Patel, drew audible groans of disgust from the audience in Worcester for its gory portrayal of a woman in a dangerous relationship to the home shopping channel.

New Zealand director Phil Brough's lighthearted and energetic animated film "Fire in Cardboard City," which follows the trials of a plucky cardboard firefighter trying to save his city from flames, generated a more cheerful response.

Friends Janet Lavine, Beth Adduci and Betsy Blackwell talked up "Two Strangers Who Met Five Times," a heartwarming, live-action short out of the United Kingdom that tells the story of two men for whom compassion ultimately prevails over intolerance.

The three women arrived from Westboro with an excited group of empty-nesters. "We didn't know what to expect. We try a different thing every month, and this is definitely one of the most original," Lavine admitted.

At the end of the evening, the audience voted on their favorite films. When the screenings are over, votes from across the world will be sent to Manhattan Short Film Festival organizers, who will announce the results on Oct. 8.

Preservation Worcester's Packard said the group is trying to reach more young people at its events and has added a student rate for the film festival. While regular tickets cost \$15, students can get in for \$10 with a student ID.

The films will run at 7 p.m. through Saturday and Friday, Oct. and Saturday, Oct. 6. There will be a matinee showing on Sunday at 4 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at the door or online at [eventbrite.com](http://eventbrite.com).

A full list of the festival finalists is available at [www.manhattanshort.com/finalists.html](http://www.manhattanshort.com/finalists.html)