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'Class C' wins regional Emmy

By MSU News Service

BOZEMAN - "Class C: The Only Game in Town," a film that tells the story of life in vanishing small towns in Montana through the lens of five girls basketball teams, won two regional Emmys at ceremonies held recently in Seattle.

The 90-minute film, co-produced by Class C Productions and Montana PBS, won an Emmy for best editing for filmmakers Shasta Grenier and Justin Lubke of Bozeman.

Kyle Sorenson, promotions producer at KUSM/MontanaPBS, won a regional Emmy for best single spot promotions for the 60-second trailer he made to promote the film on MontanaPBS. Both awards were given by the Northwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. In all, "Class C" was nominated for six NATAS regional Emmys, the most of any program in the contest.

The regional Emmys are the most recent of several awards won by the film, which was a labor of love for Grenier and Lubke, as well as producer Wally Kurth, a Billings native who has enjoyed a successful acting career in television. Last year it won best film in its category at the Jackson Documentary Film Festival. It was also the winner of the Big Sky Award at the Big Sky Film Festival.

The summers that Kurth spent in Winnett many years ago were inspiration for the film, which is a look at the girls who played for the Reed Point/Rapelje Pirates, Twin Bridges Falcons, Scobey Spartans, Rocky Boy Stars and Chester Coyotes, and the life in those towns during one long Montana winter.

"I learned firsthand, the joy, hope and passion that these



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KUSM/MontanaPBS has scheduled an encore performance of "Class C" at 7 p.m. Aug. 2.



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small towns have for their girls basketball teams," Kurth said. "I thought it was time to give these small towns, America's treasures in my opinion, some well deserved attention."

Kurth talked about the idea with friend Markus Zetler, an MSU graduate and independent producer who is credited as the line producer for the film. Zetler told long-time friend Lubke, also an MSU graduate, about the film, and he and Grenier met Kurth and talked about the idea. Lubke, who grew up in Ennis, had firsthand experience with Class C schools.

Filming began in the 2004-05 Class C season, with follow-up interviews throughout 2007.

Woven into the stories are thoughts and commentary by NBA coach Phil Jackson. Jackson, currently leading the Los Angeles Lakers in the 2009 NBA finals, talks about the importance of basketball in small-town Montana. Jackson was born in Deer Lodge and perhaps one of his favorite all-time players, his mother, was the captain of her high school team in Wolf Point.

"Basketball is a wonderful thing for a community because it is a warm place where everyone can go, and it isn't a church or a bar," said Jackson, whose grandparents homesteaded on the Hi-Line.

"We don't see so much as a basketball story - although it does give it a story thread - but rather the story about rural America," Lubke said.

He said the film reveals many of the forces at play in small-town Montana, including agricultural decline, school closure, racial conflict and teen pregnancy. He said as small towns face the hard realities of modern rural life, success on the court takes on a new significance. As Dustin Gordon, a coach from Chester explains in the film, "communities live and die through these kids."

Aaron Pruitt, director of programming at MontanaPBS, said the show has resonated with audiences. The station, which helped produce and underwrite the film, first broadcast it in February 2008 and then in March 2008 during the annual station pledge drive.

"The pledge response broke all previous records for a locally or nationally produced program by a large margin," Pruitt said.

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