

Filmmaker finds himself in New Zealand

The closer for the Eugene Celebration Film Festival shows an artist's pilgrimage in the land of the Kiwis

By SERENA MARKSTROM
The Register-Guard

Add Sándor Lau to the list of folks who wander the globe doing interesting things before discovering that Eugene feels a lot like home to them.

Just because he's settled in doesn't mean Lau has stopped doing interesting things. It's just that he seems to be one of those immigrants whose family may not have been here long, but is taking root.

Those who attend a Sunday screening of Lau's film "Behaviors of the Backpacker" — at the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts as part of the Eugene Celebration Film Festival — will learn more of the young man's story. After, they will have a chance to ask him

MOVIE PREVIEW

Behaviors of the Backpacker

What: Documentary about an American's 300-mile walk through New Zealand

When: 4:30 p.m. Sunday

Where: DIVA, 110 W. Broadway

How much: Free with Eugene Celebration wristband

For information: www.sandorlau.net

questions about the film.

Last year, Lau's 54-minute documentary "Squeegie Bandit" made it into the festi-

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Sándor Lau walked 300 miles across New Zealand, carrying a video camera all the way to make his documentary, "Behaviors of the Backpacker." The film closes the festival on Sunday.

Film: Writer becomes a documentarian

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val. So for 2009, he entered an older project.

"Backpacker" itself has done its share of traveling, having been accepted into festivals in New Zealand, Bali and the United States, a news release said.

In 2002, Lau spent two months walking the 300 miles from Auckland to Cape Reinga, a spiritually significant spot for New Zealanders. He filmed that journey, including the many locals who offered the hiker a ride, as well as many interviews with the native Maori people.

The film comes to a conclusion that Lau said still holds true after seven years of reflection.

"Part of the lesson of the entire film is ... you spend your entire life walking backward and you only see what is already passed and you have no idea what is

ahead of you," Lau said. "One of the great lessons for me was you have to ... go away from where you are from and what you know to actually get a better understanding of yourself."

That year, his plan was to study screenwriting for one year as a Fulbright scholar. Lau soon learned he was not good with plots, but rather had a talent for finding real characters and shaping their stories.

"What I did discover at film school at the University of Auckland was that I had a talent for making documentaries," he said. "Behaviors of the Backpacker" was his thesis project.

"Editing in a documentary is like writing," he said. "It is like the sound poetry of the audiovisual world. You put everything they said in an order that it says more and means more."

Katina Andoniadis,

the festival's director, said she liked the film's "raw" quality. Andoniadis thought it matched the tone of the journey depicted in the film.

After making the movie, Lau was offered a job in television. Before he knew it, he had been there for seven years.

But Lau yearned to be closer to his family, many of whom had relocated to Oregon. He has dual citizenship.

Eugene is about as much like New Zealand as he could imagine anywhere in the States being, Lau said.

"Eugene is like the least culture shock I could have," he said, noting both places are green, full of sheep and trees, and have a lot of volcanoes. "Eugene is full of a lot of people who feel passionate about social justice and the environment, just like a lot of people in New Zealand do."