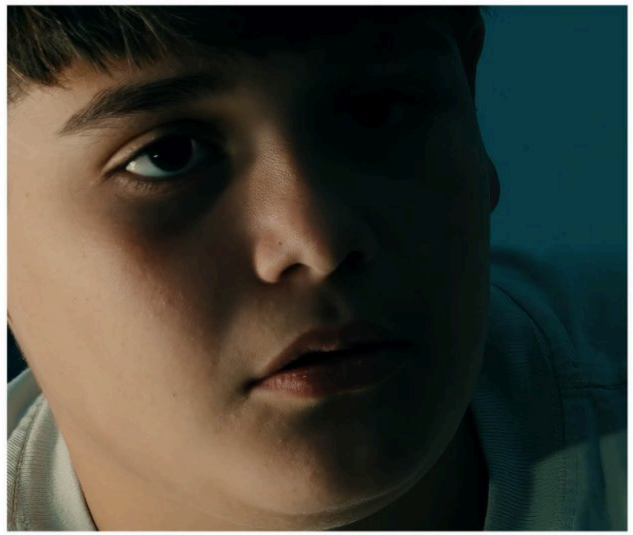
The Young Filmmakers of Tomorrow

As the Rockport Film Festival turns 20, a youth-based initiative imbues it with local fervor

By Mark Travis **Film Stills Provided by Griffyn.Co Productions**







Film stills above spotlight *Two Truths* characters Eliza, Ben and Illiana.

Armed with a bag full of cash and a dubious explanation for it, a young woman's night spirals into delirium as cracks in her facade reveal a reality she has been running from. No, this isn't the logline for the latest Martin Scorsese thriller or the next Steven Soderbergh caper, but rather the synopsis of a film called *Two Truths* which will premiere on the final day of the 20th annual Rockport Film Festival, running Oct. 30-Nov. 1. And its cast and crew will have the unique distinction of walking a red carpet before they have walked the stage at their high school graduation.

For the past two decades, the Rockport Center for the Arts has showcased independent films from across the Coastal Bend and far beyond with its annual film festival. This year will also mark the 10th submission from its Young Filmmakers of Tomorrow program, an initiative that was created to give local high school students a chance to bring their imaginations to life while gaining hands-on experience with the filmmaking process. The program comprises students from Rockport-Fulton High School who are interested in acting, directing or any other aspect of film production.

"We have a strong passion for youth education and youth development in our community," Kathleen Clark Barrera, the Deputy Director at the Rockport Center for the Arts (RCA), said. "We wanted to provide the high school students with a creative outlet to start a dialogue and express themselves."

In 2024, the RCA asked Matthew Thornton, a director who operates production company Griffyn.Co Productions out of Austin, to be the program's mentor. Thornton, who was born in Corpus Christi, had established a relationship with the RCA's staff while making a documentary on the renowned local sculptor Kent Ullberg (the film, *Ullberg: Wind in the Sails*, won Best Documentary Feature at the 2024 festival). He saw it as an excellent opportunity to grow upon the burgeoning passion in a community that is establishing itself as the preeminent home for independent film in South Texas.

"The community there have been wonderful patrons of the arts," Thornton said. "To see them getting into the schools and giving kids the opportunity to make something, it is special. The biggest value isn't even the final product, necessarily, it's that the kids learn that they can do a lot with a little."

Throughout a few pre-production meetings, the students hammer out the details of the story, go over the script and decide upon the desired mise-en-scène. Then they get a crash course in handling professional equipment, from high-end cameras to specialized audio devices. Thornton helps the group find the balance between the abundance of adolescent ingenuity and the practical matter of finding ways to commit their ideas to film. "Teaching them different zooming and framing techniques, the difficulty of recording good sound and how to use cinematography as a storytelling device," Thornton said, "those are the big parts of it."

Although Thornton presides over the entire production, occasionally he shares the director's chair with an ambitious auteur. Maxwell Lubinski, a junior at Rockport-Fulton High School, was the student director on *Two Truths* and dreams of bringing his stories to a global audience one day. "I write a lot of stories for myself, especially comics with illustrations," he said. Working alongside Thornton gave him invaluable experience leading the moviemaking process. "After seeing everything that goes into it, I definitely have a better understanding of what makes for an adaptable idea."

Two Truths will screen during the Local Love segment of this year's festival on Nov. 1.

Two Truths will screen during the Local Love segment of this year's festival on Nov. 1. Admission is free on the final day of the festival and attendees will be treated to a brunch put on by Rockport's Rotary Club. After the showing, the students involved in the production will participate in a Q&A session where they will share their favorite memories from making the film.

"I'm nervous to see it on the big screen," Lubinski said. "But I know that everyone did a great job. It was fun to work with other people and create a story together."

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