

RAYD8 Film Festival Celebrates Inaugural Year in Marina del Rey

*Honoring Independent Filmmakers,
Industry Leaders and Emerging Voices*

MARINA DEL REY, CA, UNITED STATES,
September 23, 2026 /
EINPresswire.com/ -- MARINA DEL REY,
California, September 2026. The
inaugural [RAYD8](#) Film Festival brought
filmmakers, actors, producers, writers
and entertainment industry
professionals together in Marina del
Rey, California, for a weekend
dedicated to independent storytelling,
industry education, connection and opportunity.



The festival kicked off Friday, September 18, with an Opening Night Mixer at Coco Beach Bar and Grill, featuring networking and special screenings before moving into its main festival program on Saturday, September 19, at the Hilton Garden Inn Marina del Rey. The day featured film screenings, industry panels, filmmaker conversations, red carpet moments and the inaugural RAYD8 Awards.

More than simply recognizing finished work, the inaugural festival was created to connect independent filmmakers with experienced entertainment professionals and provide conversations about navigating the industry, creating opportunities and taking projects from concept to screen.

"For our inaugural year, we wanted filmmakers to walk away with more than an award," said Gregg Sharp, Founder & CEO of the RAYD8 Film Festival. "We wanted them to leave with education, relationships and a greater understanding of how to move their careers and projects forward. The level of talent we saw from these filmmakers was incredible, and we feel extremely fortunate that so many amazing creators trusted RAYD8 with their work. To see the filmmakers learning from our panelists, supporting one another and celebrating each other made this first year everything we hoped it would be."

Industry Leaders Take the Stage

Throughout the festival, attendees heard directly from professionals representing multiple areas of film, television and entertainment.

The festival's official panelist lineup included Sensei Ron Thomas (Cobra Kai, The Karate Kid), Kat Kramer (The Diary of Anne Frank, The Miracle Worker, Little Fockers), Chris Mulkey (Captain Phillips, Boardwalk Empire, Castle Rock, Whiplash), Kirkland Morris (writer, BMF), Jasper Cole, Jamie Ohlsen, Trae Ireland, Sherrie Price Clark, Jonathan Mankuta, Danielle Napier, Amy Prenner, Vida Ghaffari, Joseph Williamson, Jerry Lee Davis and Nolan Rhys Elias, with Neil "The Media Giant" Haley serving as Emcee.

Panel conversations explored the business and creative sides of entertainment, including getting projects seen, creating opportunities rather than waiting for them, understanding the filmmaking process from different positions within the industry, taking a project from script to screen and building memorable performances.

The weekend also recognized Kat Kramer with the 2026 Activist Lifetime Achievement Award, celebrating her body of work and commitment to using entertainment and the arts as a platform for impact.

2026 RAYD8 Film Festival Award Winners

The inaugural RAYD8 Film Festival recognized work across narrative film, documentary, television, animation, performance, writing, editing, music and emerging media.

- ☐ Best Short Film: Roxy & The Man — Joey Medina
- ☐ Best Film Editing: Authentic: Real Talk About the Cave — Tommy Ross
- ☐ Best Reality TV: Billboards — Deana Molle
- ☐ Best Screenplay: Urge — Peter McNeil
- ☐ Best Experimental Film: Urge — Peter McNeil
- ☐ Best First Feature: Charlotte — Danielle Napier & Douglas J. Lester
- ☐ Best Director: 12 Sided Die, Season 2 — Curtis Fortier
- ☐ Best Student Film: A Study of Water & Walls — Yasmin Poureshagh
- ☐ Best Drama Film: Trayizon — Amber Nicolle
- ☐ Best Supporting Performance: Conflict — Krstover Luaay
- ☐ Best Horror / Thriller: Final Recovery — Harley Wallen
- ☐ Best Documentary: Bloodwork — Stephen Harold Nelson
- ☐ Audience Choice Award: Death by King Cake — David Luck
- ☐ Best Lead Performance: Urge — Peter McNeil
- ☐ Best Comedy Film: Death by King Cake — David Luck
- ☐ Emerging Voices: Mafia Daddies — Dianna M. Ippolito

- Media Award – Best Podcast: Criminally Good Podcast — Sherrie Price Clark
- Best Social Impact Film: Brunch Before Baptism — David Luck
- Best Original Score: 12 Sided Die, Season 2 — Curtis Fortier
- Cultural Impact Award: The Product — Deana Molle
- Best Animated Film: Fort Woke Force — Douglas J. Lester
- People’s Choice Award: 12 Sided Die, Season 2 — Curtis Fortier
- Best Narrative Feature: Salted Bones — Stephen Harold Nelson
- Activist Lifetime Achievement Award 2026: Kat Kramer

More Than an Awards Ceremony

The first RAYD8 Film Festival was built around the belief that a festival can serve as both a celebration and a bridge to what comes next.

By combining screenings and awards with access to working entertainment professionals and meaningful conversations about the realities of building a career, RAYD8 sought to create an environment where filmmakers could leave Marina del Rey with new relationships, knowledge and opportunities alongside their recognition.

The festival also reflects the larger mission of RAYD8 TV: “Where Entertainment Becomes Opportunity.” Through its growing streaming platform, RAYD8 continues working to provide independent creators with opportunities for their projects to reach audiences beyond the festival circuit.

Following a successful inaugural year, the RAYD8 Film Festival looks ahead to continuing to grow its community of filmmakers, industry professionals and audiences while creating new pathways for independent stories to be discovered.

Support independent films beyond the festival. Download RAYD8 TV in the App Store on your phone, tablet, or smart TV to watch and support not only the talented independent filmmakers who participated in this year’s RAYD8 Film Festival, but an ever-growing lineup of incredible independent filmmakers and storytellers from around the world.

About RAYD8 Film Festival

The RAYD8 Film Festival is an independent film festival and industry event created to celebrate filmmakers while connecting emerging and established voices with education, exposure, industry relationships and distribution opportunities. The inaugural festival was held September 18–19, 2026, in Marina del Rey, California.

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