

This is KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nigel O'Shea bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, September 4, 2024.

The star-studded optimism of last month's Democratic National Convention drew in a lot of viewers who have not watched such a political event for years. While our screens provided an adequate view of the action, attending the convention takes the experience to another level. The smells, sights, and sounds of a live event are a more profound experience. On August 9, Sean Koomen was winding up his day at the Northwest School of Wooden Boat Building when he got a call from a high school classmate, who was also a member of the football team at Mankato West High School in Minnesota. The old team was getting back together in honor of their coach, Tim Walz, the newly minted Democratic vice presidential nominee. They were set to appear with Coach Walz on the stage of the Democratic National Convention to cheer him on.

Koomen called the experience "totally surreal." The assembled team spent time backstage, where they observed the convention's inner workings. They crossed paths with people like Bill Clinton, Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, and Oprah Winfrey. Once there, the old acquaintances picked up where they left off. Koomen said, "How he is acting right now in interviews and speeches is exactly how he was as a teacher. His personality hasn't changed. He was an inspiring teacher and football coach. I think that's the energy that people can relate with him really well. Honestly, he's just a regular person." The team hung out with Walz and his wife Gwen, who was also one of Koomen's teachers. All told, the team spent several hours with the potential second couple.

Koomen, 42, graduated from St. Olaf's College outside of Minneapolis before enrolling in the Boat School in Port Townsend, graduating in 2004. He worked in a variety of jobs around the West Coast before returning to the Boat School in 2011 as an instructor. Koomen said that Walz's former students have supported all of his campaigns through the years and that there is a healthy cohort of people who are supporting him at a grassroots level.

Film festivals the world over appeal to audiences as a way to experience films they might not be able to see any other way. It's also a chance to see and be seen with the glitterati and the artistic elite who populate our news feeds every day. At the community film festival level, like what we have here in Port Townsend, it is an event that is also about community involvement, volunteerism, and the impact of bringing new ideas and new people into the conversation a town is having about itself and its place in the world.

For filmmakers, though, the film festival has traditionally been a cultural gatekeeper and the determining factor in their potential success. The rags-to-riches promise of getting into one of the top festivals and getting a big distribution or streaming deal is the dream most filmmakers are chasing. It is also the primary way most burgeoning filmmakers are planning to recoup the money they and their investors poured into their project. Yet, the possibility of this dream becoming reality has always been slim at best, and according to many, it is becoming even more rare.

While A-list film festivals may be struggling with (or actively ignoring) very real critiques, it's possible for the smaller festivals, where access to distributors has never been a factor, to brush off the issues caused by chasing financial success.

Jemma Desai, a programmer, researcher, and writer based in London, asks a particularly relevant question, which all cultural presenters should be asking themselves and their communities. "What do we want from each

other after we have told our stories?” When we work to build community through film, this question goes to the core.

For small town events like Port Townsend Film Festival, the act of buying and selling national distribution rights is not a circumstance we are generally involved in. We are, however, uniquely positioned to experiment and innovate. Without the pressure of big deals, small festivals might just be the circumstance in which artists and audiences can really communicate with one another. In a world where there is an increasing gap between the tens of thousands of worthy but little seen films created each year and the larger budget, but extremely limited, variety of films available in theaters and streaming services, the small-town festival may just be the place where we can figure out what we can give each other after we’ve told our stories.

If you would like to be a part of bringing these stories to our community, the Port Townsend Film Festival is still looking for volunteers to help make the magic happen. The festival is on September 19 through 22, and tickets are still available from their website, <https://ptfilm.org/>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesdays to bring you stories from the *Jefferson County Beacon*. You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Nigel O’Shea and thanks for listening.