

REEL MADNESS

Festival unspools showcase of mental health films

BY MICHAEL D. REID
Times Colonist staff

IF A MENTALLY ILL PERSON pushes a commuter onto a subway track in Toronto or someone suffering from manic depression shoots a bystander in Australia, chances are we'll soon be reading about it in the newspaper.

Bruce Saunders has had enough of those bad news stories. And he's determined to do something about it.

One of the ways he has been challenging common perceptions about mental illness is through Movie Monday, his popular weekly series of free screenings at the Eric Martin Pavilion that is entering its eighth year. Another is through his spinoff festival Reel Madness, which tonight unspools its third annual showcase of off-Hollywood movies about mental health problems and how we react to them.

"It's amazingly difficult to get the good news about mental illness out there," laments Saunders, 46. "We



➤ **Barry Saunders: Challenging perceptions of mental illness through films.**
John McKay/Times Colonist

need to hear more about recovery, and about people who do well in spite of their illnesses."

Saunders is living proof of that. A onetime psychiatric patient at the Roy-

al Jubilee Hospital's mental health facility, he is manic depressive himself and a devoted visitor to his 82-year-old mother, an Alzheimer's patient. He has risen above his disease.

The wiry, articulate film buff, family man and landscape gardener describes his cinematic brainchild as a therapeutic experience. And his efforts have not gone unrewarded. Whidby Island's Giraffe Project gave Saunders a "Giraffe," for having stuck his neck out in attempts to create a positive out of a negative. And the Canada Council has increased its funding for this year's Reel Madness, which also receives support from corporate sponsors, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Capital Health Region and "my mom and dad," among others.

Modelled on Toronto's Rendez-Vous with Madness, Saunders's variation is expanding its scope this year in attempts to appeal to the general public and those he describes as "consumers" of mental health services.

"It's important that people who have illnesses participate as well as the art crowd," says Saunders. "It's a drag to exclude people from the films that are about them."

Please see REEL MADNESS, B5

Reel Madness Film Festival

What: An Exploration of Mental Illness and Recovery Through Film and Video

Where: Movie Monday Theatre, Eric Martin Pavilion, 1900 Block Fort Street

When: Jan. 18-22, screenings nightly at 6:30

Admission: By donation.

Festival Workshops

Sat., 1-4 p.m.: How to Survive as a Filmmaker, with Lulu Keating (\$10)

Sun., 1-4 p.m.: Taking a Topic of Social Relevance...And Telling It in A Dramatic Context, with Davor Marjanovic (\$15)

Pre-registration by e-mail: bsaunders@islandnet.com

Info: 595-FLIC