



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **BIG ARTS PAYS TRIBUTE TO OUTSTANDING CINEPHILES VISNJA AND STAN GEMBICKI** *SUBMITTED BY BIG ARTS AND KATHLEEN MAHAN*

Sanibelians Visnja and Stan Gembicki received the first BIG ARTS “OSCARs” for Best Cinephile and Best Supporting Cinephile on April 22, 2024, in Christensen Performance Hall. Presented by Lee Ellen Harder, Executive Director, and Wilson McCray, Programs Manager, the awards honored the Gembickis’ leadership in BIG ARTS Monday Night Film Series program for almost two decades. They accepted the awards before the screening of *Four Daughters*, an independent Tunisian film that was part of the 2023-24 film program.

The Gembickis became involved with the BIG ARTS film program in 2007. Soon after, the founder of the Monday Night Series JR Pascall, passed the baton to Visnja to chair the film committee. With Stan by her side, they have curated the program along with a group of dedicated volunteers. The committee’s work includes researching, screening, and putting together the yearly line-up of more than 20 independent films and documentaries each season. Don and Stefi Irwin, also recently retired long-time film committee volunteers, recruited and coordinated weekly moderators who lead lively discussions after each film.

“The moderators researched each film- the writer, the director, and cast and then asked the audience for their input”, said Visnja. “The input from the audiences was special,” said Stan. “People brought their own experiences into the film conversations...it was always so interesting to hear their reactions and comments.”

As she and Stan accepted the awards Visnja said “This total of 17 years of involvement was a wonderful volunteer activity for us. If you love movies, please consider participating in the program in the future.” She went on to say, “these are arthouse movies; they are not something you can see in many places. Yes, you can see some of them from home on small screens, but there is no comparison to seeing them on the big screen in the theater at BIG ARTS.” Stan added “we sometimes say that we have earned a couple of MFA degrees in film, participating in these film viewings and conversations. It is quite an experience in learning.”

BIG ARTS thanks Visnja and Stan for their years of volunteer service and valued contributions to the film program!

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