

Rough cut of movie screened to packed houses

Contributed by Mike Devich
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“Wild West Country” film in progress shown to invitation-only crowds

Those who were driving past the Reel Cinema in Wofford Heights this past weekend were probably wondering what all the Old West characters were doing out front.

Mike Woodward, Nathan Eddy, Dale Charter and a host of others appeared in their Old West costumes for invitation-only screenings of Chuck Barbee’s new film, “Wild West Country.”

Barbee is a retired Hollywood cameraman who lives in Kernville. He is adapting the late Bob Powers’ nine books of Kern River Valley history for the screen, and the first one is now finished enough to show it to many people who were connected with the project.

So Friday through Monday Barbee showed the almost-completed 80-minute first segment at the Reel Cinema in Wofford Heights. It was a work print, explained Barbee.

The Courier attended the Sunday screening, which was packed to the point that extra chairs had to be placed in the aisles.

Local folks star in the film and play the parts of storytellers around a campfire, setting up the segments narrated by Barbee.

The first part of the documentary is called “The Lure of Gold” and ends with the establishment of the town of Whiskey Flat. Part 2 will be finished in six months to a year. Barbee hopes to sell the films to television with eventual DVD distribution.

Barbee introduced the film and wrapped it up afterward, thanking many people who were instrumental in the project. These include his wife Liz Barbee, Linda James Clark, Mike Gallagher, Josh Gordon and Roberta Piazza-Gordon, Gayle Whitlock, Morgan Lambert, Linda Lambert Thomas and Mike Thomas, Tom and Debbie Teofilo, and many more, as well as the late Grace Kissack.

There was much applause and a standing ovation for Barbee.

Barbee is thrilled with the film and with the response. And he says he gets to feel like a kid again. “I’m getting to make a Western!” he remarked at Sunday’s screening.