

Sans celebrities, the film is the star of the festival

BY CARY DARLING

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FORT WORTH — The red carpet was rolled out and photographers stood at the ready Wednesday evening for the first night of the second annual Lone Star International Film Festival at the AMC Palace Theater downtown. But there was one thing missing: big names.

Neither Amy Adams nor Emily Blunt, stars of the official opening-night film *Sunshine Cleaning*, was on hand, but that didn't put a damper on the festivities or dampen the organizers' enthusiasm. "We don't have the star wattage," said programming director Alec Jhangiani. "But we want to focus on the films. As the festival evolves, people will be a lot more inclined to come. It's hard for them to focus on a small festival."

While the marquee personalities might have been absent, the audience wasn't. About 300 people attended the screening, filling about three-quarters of the auditorium. Just the fact that a new indie film was being shown in Fort Worth was enough to draw some patrons.

"It's long overdue," said Theresa Sittler, a film fan from North Richland Hills. "Dallas has the Angelika [theater] and we don't have anything."

Before the movie started, artistic director Dennis Bishop welcomed the audience and seemed pleased by the turnout because "we were wondering if we should go into the 100-seat theater."

He even thanked the previous director, Tom Huckabee, who was fired from his position last year. However, Huckabee was in attendance and received an ovation from the audience.

"We're trying to build on the success of last year," Bishop said. "We want to build a unique festival. We're not trying to be Sundance. We're not trying to be Telluride."

Sunshine Cleaning, a comedic drama in the vein of *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Juno*, also received applause as the credits rolled.

Still, some wanted a bit more true Hollywood flavor to the whole thing.

"Last year, [actor] Bill Paxton was walking around," said Mike Hollis of Fort Worth, who was standing near the red carpet before the screening, armed with his camera. "This year, there are no stars. It's not setting a good precedent."

The film festival continues through Sunday with screenings at the AMC Palace, Four Day Weekend Theater, Norris Conference Center, The Modern and the Kimbell.