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Reel Minds Film Festival to put mental illness in the spotlight

BY BILL KRESS

NAMI Miami-Dade is putting mental illness, treatment, and recovery in the spotlight at the upcoming third annual Reel Minds Miami Mental Health Film Festival. The free event, hosted by NAMI Miami-Dade (National Alliance on Mental Illness), takes place at University of Miami's Donna E. Shalala Student Center Grand Ballroom on May 20, beginning at 6 p.m., with films showings at 7 p.m.

NAMI hosts this annual film festival to advocate for greater understanding of mental illness and raise funding for its various programs and support services in the community.

"Film is a compelling storytelling form that connects with our deepest sensibilities," said Kathryn Coppola, NAMI Miami-Dade president. "That's why for the third consecutive year we are showcasing a curated list of short films inspired by the lives of those who have been affected by mental illness."

The narratives to be featured will reflect a range of life experiences meant to inspire, heal and empower.

Coppola said mental illness affects one in five people, yet many people do not understand how it may affect them, their families, friends, and co-workers.

"We need to start a conversation about mental health and the Reel Minds Film Festival helps us to do just that," she said.

Reel Minds program will feature six to eight films covering a selection of the following mental health issues (subject to change): Schizophrenia, Depression, Autism, Alzheimer's, Suicide, Eating Disorders, Social-Media Addiction and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Final film titles will be available soon on the website.

Live music by the band "Fog Dog" will be performed during the opening reception featuring two musicians who use their personal experiences with mental illness to advocate for combating stigma and increasing understanding.

The event is cosponsored by the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences. Fellow NAMI



FogDog to perform live at Reel Minds Film Festival.

Miami-Dade board member Dr. Anna Shustack also noted the organization is partnering with Miami-based Catering by Les for in-kind donation of a portion of the food and non-alcoholic drinks to be served to the anticipated 1,000 guests.

"We were so fortunate to partner with Les last year and to have him back with his generous support of the festival," she continued.

The program also features an awards presentation honoring two local leaders who have contributed greatly to awareness and mental health services in the Miami community.

NAMI Miami Dade Mental Health Advocate of the Year Award: Judge Steven Leifman, Associate Administrative Judge for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. He is chair of South Florida Behavioral Health Network, the managing entity for oversight of mental health and substance abuse for Miami Dade and Monroe counties, and chairs the Florida Supreme Court Task Force on Mental Health. He has created a national model program in Miami for diverting mentally ill individuals involved in the justice system from incarceration to treatment and

recovery.

NAMI Miami Dade Lifetime Achievement Award: John Dow, has been president and CEO of South Florida Behavioral Health Network since 2005. A social worker and advocate for the mentally ill, John is retiring in August. NAMI is honoring him for his work in establishing high standards of care in mental health and substance abuse and for his commitment to helping the most vulnerable in our community.

NAMI Miami-Dade is the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the largest grassroots mental health organization in the U.S.

About Reel Minds: Tickets are free, parking is free, and doors open at 6 p.m. with complimentary light hors d'oeuvres, non-alcoholic beverages, and live music. Films begin at 7 p.m. A sign-language interpreter will be onsite. Sponsorships still are available.

For information, call 305-665-2540, visit <https://namimiami.org/>, or send email to NAMIMiami@gmail.com. To register for free tickets, visit <https://reelminds.eventbrite.com> or visit <https://namimiami.org/>.