

## 'Bad River' film draws viewers nationwide

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Mary Mazzio's latest movie, "Bad River," examines the tribe's battles for sovereignty, culminating in its ongoing conflict with Enbridge Energy Co. The film garnered national attention as it was shown in 25 cities.  
Contributed photo

A documentary shot in the Bay Area has made quite an impression, becoming the must-see movie at the Bay Theater for months while garnering national attention.

The 90-minute film "Bad River" directed by Mary Mazzio, chronicles the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

Shortly after it was released in March, "Bad River" became the most popular movie in Ashland and remained at the top the first month it was released.

"For the first four weeks on Tuesday, it sold out," said theater manager Jon Huybrecht. "A lot of customers came to see it multiple times and wanted to bring friends and family."

It was so popular, he said, that he and staff had to turn people away after all the tickets sold out. Based on its success, the Bay Theater continued showing it through mid-May, which Huybrecht said is almost unheard of in the movie theater world.

"To have movies shown for months is a big deal. Even when 'Barbie' came out, it came and went and [Bad River] still sold better," he said.

Following its debut in Ashland, "Bad River" was shown across the country, garnering the attention of celebrities such as Mark Ruffalo, Leonardo DiCaprio and Channing Tatum.

Witnessing this level of excitement warmed Huybrecht's heart.

"The best part of my job is seeing customers excited about movies, especially people involved. It touched my heart hearing a kid say 'that's my favorite movie of all time because my grandpa was in the movie,'" he said.

When Mazzio made the film, she was told it wouldn't get much attention.

"Everyone going into this said the documentary film industry has dried up, no one is moving product or doing anything," she recalled.

For the film, she interviewed several Bad River tribal members, including Patty Loew, professor emerita at Northwestern University. She spoke about the tribe's resilient past, going back to the negotiations between Kechewashke, or Chief Buffalo, and President Millard Fillmore to preserve Ojibwe land. Loew said the tribe has since fought for recognition of its right to hunt and fish in ceded territory, to preserve their land and to ensure a good life for future generations. The film covers the history of Ojibwe conflicts, including the U.S. government removing kids from their families and sending them to boarding schools, the Walleye Wars when other residents violently protested Ojibwe fishing rights, and the tribe's stand against the open-pit Gogebic Taconite mining operation that threatened local waters. The battle with Enbridge is the latest chapter of that story, Loew said.

Talking to the tribal members, Mazzio said, filled her with "the Bad River spirit" to fight for what you believe. She didn't listen to naysayers telling her the movie wouldn't be successful. She and her crew overcame the obstacle, thanks in part to a partnership she has with AMC Theatres.

Beyond Ashland, the film opened in 12 major cities and eventually expanded to 25. More theaters wanted to show the film, but Mazzio said they were limited to just 25 due to insurance issues. In addition to individual moviegoers local and regional schools bused students to Ashland to allow them to see the film, and tribal communities hosted viewing parties.

"To have this kind of traction means that the Bad River Band's story was compelling," Mazzio said.

Overwhelmed by the success of the film, Mazzio considers the documentary a career highlight that "has taught me so much" about her outlook on life.

"How do I as a person think in the long term, less about myself and more about those around me and future generations to come?" she asked.

Mazzio is most proud of hearing and seeing the emotional response from viewers.

"What is so moving about the audience reaction is the sense of pride that young people have when they get out of the theater. That is such a beautiful thing because of the historical trauma and oppression. When people pose by the poster for a photo, that is extraordinary. I never could have imagined that a project like this would create this kind of response. It's been amazing to witness."



Mazzio



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