

# AN OSCAR NOMINEE WITH OREGON ROOTS

Grant County graduate earns 2nd nomination with his latest documentary, 'Hunger Ward'

BY RUDY DIAZ  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Filmmaker Skye Fitzgerald carried the lessons he learned in high school in the tiny town of Monument all the way to war-torn Yemen, the setting for his latest documentary "Hunger Ward," which is in the running for an Academy Award at Sunday's ceremony.

It's Fitzgerald's second Oscar nomination, and he said his time growing up in rural Grant County taught him the value of hard work and gave him an appreciation of "the simple things in life" when his family moved to a house 16 miles outside of Monument that lacked running water and electricity when he was in eighth grade.

"The fact that we didn't have running water or electricity made me appreciate them all the more when I went to college in La Grande at Eastern Oregon University," he said.

Fitzgerald said he knew he wanted to pursue a career where he could bring to light the challenges faced by others in the world who

lack fundamental resources such as running water, electricity or access to health care.

"In some small sense, I experienced some of that lack myself, and I wanted to make sure that whatever I devoted my career to, there's an attempt to use my career for good to get change," Fitzgerald said.

His 2018 film "Lifeboat," also nominated for an Oscar, followed search and rescue operations off the coast of Libya.

"Hunger Ward," competing in this year's short documentary category, focuses on two therapeutic feeding centers in Yemen for children suffering from malnutrition. He said the Oscar nomination gives the documentary another chance to raise awareness about the conflict.

"It's important that I use my own tools as a filmmaker to try to intervene and bring the issue to the largest audience possible to alter this unfolding tragedy that doesn't need to occur because of this human-caused war," Fitzgerald said.

Fitzgerald said he shot the film over 30 days in January and February last year in Yemen, which is caught in a war between Saudi Arabia-backed pro-government forces and the rebel Houthi movement.

Filming in a conflict zone was challenging, especially when the Saudi coalitions reject journalists and filmmakers in the country. He



Fitzgerald



Submitted photo

Skye Fitzgerald filming a search and rescue operation in the Southern Mediterranean.

said his party was detained in Yemen for seven hours before being released.

"You have to fight very hard and in nuanced ways to get into the conflict zone," Fitzgerald said. "Once you're there you have to work in careful, delicate ways to keep yourself from danger."

Seeing children die was extremely difficult, he said, but the crew wanted to portray the war authentically — even if it was hard to watch.

"To me, it made the project even more important because it was so challenging," Fitzgerald said. "Just because something is hard, it

doesn't mean that it's not worthwhile."

Without electricity in Monument, Fitzgerald said he did not have a chance to learn much about cinema and media until he went to college, and his family is helping others dream big through the annual Dream Scholarship awarded to a graduate of Monument High School who is pursuing higher education.

Fitzgerald said success is not tied to where a person went to school or even innate talent: It's about will and a willingness to improve.

The 93rd Academy Awards ceremony is Sunday, 5-8 p.m. on ABC.

## Dispatch

Continued from A1

The resulting pilot program would cost the county approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000 and would strengthen an existing program, the Mobile Crisis Assessment Team, or MCAT, by funding two mental health workers to respond to calls of suicidal subjects without involving law enforcement.

Police officers would still be dispatched if the person is known to have a weapon or has attempted suicide before.

Leaders of Redmond Police Department and Bend Police Department are supportive of the idea, Harris said. If approved, the program could begin in September.

"Law enforcement has told us this is a great place to start, and that it would help them out tremendously if we were able to take those off their hands," Harris said.

Data from Deschutes 911 shows these responses last an average of two hours and rarely require a police presence, Harris said. And just as police are ill-equipped to respond to mental health calls, mental health workers are not trained in situational awareness and other law enforcement concepts.

The pilot program would involve training for mental health workers to operate police radios and know when to call for backup when they feel their safety is at risk. Fortunately, studies from successful similar programs in the U.S. show that's a rare occurrence, Harris said.

A unique Lane County program, CAHOOTS, is considered a national model in crisis response. CAHOOTS is tied in with a medical clinic, which allows 911 operators to dispatch two-person teams consisting of an EMT and a mental health worker in an ambulance.

Such an arrangement is not currently in the works in Deschutes County, but local leaders are looking at expanding the types of emergency calls mental health workers respond to, like disorderly conduct and trespassing, calls that often involve a mental health component.

There are four programs in the county that currently address mental health crises.

- The Bend City Council-funded Crisis Response Team, a mental

health unit within the Bend Police Department.

- Bend Police's grant-funded Co-Responder program, which embeds two Deschutes County mental health workers in the Bend Police Department. Mental health counselor Abby Levin responds alongside Bend officer to calls in city limits and connects subjects with services. Harris said the program has been a big success, diverting an increasing number of people from the justice system each year, but that only shows the need in the region.

Levin is only able to respond on calls during her four 10-hour shifts per week, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

- "We could use it round-the-clock," Harris said.

The program is assured federal grant funding through October 2023.

- The county's MCAT, which responds to mental health calls county-wide and in the emergency room at St. Charles Bend, though not alongside deputies in their vehicles. Response times vary though they've been decreasing and can be as short as 10 to 15 minutes, according to Deschutes County Mental Health.

In 2020, MCAT responded on 9,500 calls, a jump of 45% from 2019.

- The county also operates the Stabilization Center, opened in 2020, on the Bend law enforcement campus on Poe Sholes Drive. It provides services to adults and children experiencing short-term mental health crisis.

Reporter: 541-383-0325, gandrews@bendbulletin.com

# SPRING SAVINGS EVENT

Mattresses • Recliners • Sofas • Sectionals • Bedroom Sets • Dining Sets • Accessories

**Chofa**  
Just **\$549**

**Lift Chairs**  
From **\$699**

**Swivel Glider Recliner**  
Just **\$549**

**FREE Foundation or FREE Pillows with Purchase**

**THERAPEDIC** **AIRELOOM**

Since 1962  
**WILSONS of Redmond**  
Still The Oldest & Largest Furniture Store in Central Oregon!



**FREE DELIVERY & SPECIAL FINANCING AVAILABLE\***

**Wilson's MATTRESS Gallery-Bend**

\*Subject to credit approval. See store for details

2071 S. Hwy 97, Redmond 541-548-2066 • www.wilsonsofredmond.net • 63485 N. Hwy 97, Bend 541-330-5084