

Oscar nominee is tops locally

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Jeffrey Overstreet speaks during the Imago Film Festival at Judson University in Elgin, Ill., on Friday, April 1, 2011. | Andrew A. Nelles~For Sun-Times Media |

ELGIN — The “death crawl” scene in “Facing the Giants” has inspired several NFL teams, at the top of their game, since the independent film was made by Sherwood Baptist Church in Georgia and released in 2006 by Sony. It also has tortured countless high school football teams across the country that have emulated the drill, each team member crawling across the football field with

another player across his back.

And 2008’s “Fireproof” has saved more than a million marriages on the verge of divorce.

That’s according to David Nixon, who produced both movies and delivered the creative keynote address to open the Imago Film Festival last Monday at Judson University.

“That’s the power of movies, and that’s how we can change culture,” Nixon said.

“That’s what we’re all about, making these little films to that can change perception — that can change culture.”

Imago screened 18 of those little films over the past week, each less than

a half-hour long, which were entered into the faith-based festival by filmmakers all over the world.

Each explored “the intersection of faith and film,” according to festival director Terry Wandtke. And each had that power to change perceptions and culture.

One one of those films screened Monday, which took “Best in Show” at Imago, was the 2010 Oscar-nominated short “Kavi” by Gregg Halvey.

The 19-minute film tells the story of Kavi, a little boy whose family is forced to work in a brick kiln in India to pay his father’s debt. His is a fictional story that shows the reality of the 27 million people worldwide who live in modern-day slavery, according to the film’s end credits.

The film “Afghan” by Pardis Parker, which took first place among movies under 15 minutes, chronicles an Afghani-American making light of a slur spray-painted on his car telling him to “go home.” “Rita,” an Italian film by Antonio Piazza about a 10-year-old girl who has been blind from birth and her encounter with a boy on the run, took first for movies 15 to 30 minutes at Imago and previously at the prestigious Cannes International Film Festival in France.

“Last Rain,” a 23-minute film from Spain by Tony Lopez, took “Audience Choice” at the film festival.

Imago is just one of 15 faith-based film festivals in the United States, according to Wandtke. And it’s the only one in the Midwest, he said. That’s “notable” as both film festivals have exploded in the past 15 years, and the so-called faith-based film genre in the past seven, according to the festival director.

This year’s short-film festival also included a discussion of “Where the Wild Things Are” led by film critic J. Robert Parks and a critical, closing keynote by critic and former “Christianity Today” columnist Jeffrey Overstreet.

Other entries included “A Saint in my Garden,” a documentary that connects the lives of St. Francis of Assisi and painter Adele Travisano, was made by actor Tony Hale, best known from TV show “Arrested Development.”

And the documentary “A New Dream” chronicles Fourth of July weekend in the lives of one family who immigrated to the U.S. from Colombia and remain undocumented. Undocumented workers are the fastest-growing demographic in evangelical churches, according to documentary maker Jesse Oxford of East Dundee.

“We’ve heard tonight about how God will shape culture,” Oxford said last Monday. “What I want to talk about is a movie I hope God will use to help shape the church.”