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## Independent film series to begin with 'Hillbilly'

By JACKSON FRENCH [jfrench@bgdailynews.com](mailto:jfrench@bgdailynews.com) 4 hrs ago

The Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers begins in Bowling Green this week with a documentary that challenges stereotypes about Appalachia.

The film “Hillbilly” will be screened at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Capitol Arts Center, followed by a question-and-answer session with people involved with the film. A performance by Appalachian singer/songwriter Sam Gleaves will precede the screening at 6 p.m. The event is free and a ticket is not required.

Tony Harkins, a history professor at Western Kentucky University who is interviewed in “Hillbilly,” said the film seeks to examine and challenge persistent media portrayals that paint rural people as backwards and isolated. Harkins said while stereotypical depictions of groups such as African-Americans have become taboo, the same is not true of the “hillbilly” stereotype.

“The hillbilly is just sort of evergreen,” he said. “It never goes away.”

This largely stems from a perceived association between rural people and poverty, Harkins said.

“Poverty is often demonized,” he said.

Harkins has plenty of experience researching the topic, having published a book, “Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon,” in 2004.

“What the movie does that my book doesn’t is that it talks about it in very personal ways,” he said.

Harkins will participate in the Q&A session with Samantha Cole, an associate producer of the film. Cole, who grew up in Lee County and is also interviewed in the film, said the entire Appalachian region is written off as an area inhabited by poor, ignorant people obsessed with guns.

“Appalachia is a very complex and diverse region, which I feel often gets swept under the rug,” she said.





Sally Rubin and Ashley York, the film’s co-directors, both have Appalachian roots and wanted to explore the damaging effects the hillbilly stereotype can have on the region, Cole said.

According to Cole, Rubin was inspired to make a film that explored the stereotype while watching the Netflix series “Orange is the New Black,” which includes a meth-ravaged, Southern inmate the other characters refer to as Pennsatucky.

“She watched this and thought, ‘What the heck is this character? She’s 1,000 different stereotypes at once,’ ” she said.

Robert Hankins, communications director for the Warren County Public Library, which was involved with planning the event, said he expects the screening will draw a large crowd, based on the large turnout for “Look and See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry,” which also had a Kentucky connection, at last year’s Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers.

He said the library decided to organize the Gleaves performance to accompany the screening after seeing previous tour stops provide similar events.

“It’s going to be a little bonus for people who are interested,” he said.

## MORE INFORMATION

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### **Jackson French**

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