



JULIE FLETCHER/ORLANDO SENTINEL

For Nina Streich, the Orlando Global Peace Film Festival's director, obstacles are made to be overcome — and big-name allies are ready to help.

# GIVE PEACE a CHANCE

By MICHAEL McLEOD || SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Each year when Nina Streich comes to Central Florida to organize the Orlando Global Peace Film Festival, she takes on a lifestyle that fits right into an enterprise with such a retro, neo-hippie ring to it.

She holes up in a windowless, \$400-a-month office, working long hours with idealistic volunteers who have vanity license plates proclaiming "1WRLD" and "PEACE2U." She crashes in spare bedrooms, drives around town in a borrowed Mazda with 130,000 miles on it, and begs corporate sponsors, usually unsuccessfully, for money to fund the late-September festival.

But while local doors are still being slammed in her face, the world has come knocking.



Exotic names pop up on her e-mail: Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Yael Gourvitch, Tendo Oto — an array of contacts that spans a variety of continents and time zones.

Streich is in the middle of a three-year contract to stage peace film festivals in three Japanese cities. She is working with the Chinese government to set up a peace film festival there, with an emphasis on en-

vironmental issues. And late last year, she flew to the Israeli border town of Eilat and found herself in the middle of discussions between officials from Jordan, Israel and the Paris Peace Committee.

The outcome: In March of 2008, a series of peace-related films will be shown in a tent erected on the border between

It's a labor of love and persistence, but organizing the Orlando Global Peace Film Festival has won activist Nina Streich global respect.

## Global Peace Film Festival facts

■ The Global Peace Film Festival will take place Sept. 26-30.

■ Films will be screened at CityArts Factory, the Orlando Science Center and Rollins College.

■ Tickets are \$8 per film. Passes for the entire festival are \$99 and \$199.

■ Passes and tickets are available online at [peacefilmfest.org](http://peacefilmfest.org), and at the Q Gallery in the CityArts Factory, 29 S. Orange Ave., from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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# Streich's persistence impresses community leaders

STREICH FROM F1

the two countries, so that citizens of Israel and Jordan can watch them together.

"I was dumbfounded. I was sitting there, thinking: 'This is real. This is happening,'" she recalls.

It was all the more amazing, given the festival's rocky local history.

## Shaky beginnings

Streich, 53, was living in New York City as a freelance producer of film festivals and other film-related events when she was introduced in 2003 to a man who called himself Abdul Tawala Ibn Ali Alishdari. He said he wanted to fund an annual film festival, to be called the Orlando Global Peace Film Festival, and stage it in Central Florida, where he had relatives.

She took the job, using her contacts to put prestigious names on the advisory committee: Yoko Ono, Susan Sarandon, Martin Sheen, Philip Glass, Lee Grant. Then she flew to Orlando to set up shop.

But there were problems from the beginning, not just with residents suspicious of the very notion of a peace film festival — "People kept asking me: 'Why do you hate President Bush?'" — but with her mysterious sponsor.

He was uninterested in the nuts and bolts of putting the festival together. He had no idea about what films to include. And as deadlines neared, he had bad news: He was under investigation for fraud, and his assets had been frozen.

"He had all these lofty ideas about the festival being the most important event in the history of mankind," she recalled. "I'd say: 'There won't be any event if you don't come up with the money.'"

Though the funds materialized as promised and the festival went on as planned, friends advised Streich to cut her ties and move on. She couldn't bring herself to do it. It was too much of a dream job for her, uniting two subjects that had intrigued her since childhood: movie-making and social causes.



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In her crowded office on a Universal Studios back lot, Nina Streich negotiates festival details with a contact in China.

## Taste of activism

Streich was born in the U.S. but grew up in London, where her family moved in the 1960s because of an opportunity for her father, who produced commercials.

Many of his friends were leftist-leaning American writers and actors who had emigrated to the U.K. after being blacklisted in Hollywood during the anti-communist crusades of the McCarthy era. Streich became fascinated with their cause and their ideals, as much as their stories about the entertainment industry.

She started working as an editor, and eventually returned to the U.S. to take a job editing movie previews. Eventually, she shifted toward politics and social causes. In 1982, she got involved in a disarmament rally in New York City that was in response to the development of neutron bombs and the notion of a "winnable nuclear war."

Later she worked for Michael



COURTESY OF NINA STREICH

A Japanese billboard advertising a film festival Nina Streich helped to arrange places her photo top and center.

Dukakis' presidential campaign, then as deputy commissioner for David Dinkins, New York City's first black mayor.

The taste of social activism she'd gotten from those jobs made shaping a world peace

just too much for her to resist.

So she stayed with the Orlando Global Peace Film Festival and developed a philosophy about what kind of films to show that would reach beyond the anti-war stereotype, touching on a

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— NINA STREICH

variety of subjects: immigration issues, the environment, inner-city problems, cultural clashes.

Gradually, she developed local contacts. All of the international projects Streich is working on developed through filmmakers, viewers and volunteers she met in Orlando. Many of the connections she has made here come from unexpected places and points of view.

"I'm the most unlikely guy in the world to say good things about somebody like Nina," says Carl Coleman Sr., a friend

and a Vietnam war veteran who piloted Cobra gunships. "I look at people like that, tree huggers, peace people, and they don't make much sense to me. But Nina's a good thinker, for a Democrat. We don't change each other's minds. But we've had some good conversations."

## Persistence pays off

Streich's persistence has impressed decision makers in the community.

"People in this industry make grand predictions and promises all day long," says Suzy Allen, vice president of film and digital media for the Orlando Film Commission. "To Nina's credit, she makes a promise and sticks to it."

She also knows how to play hardball. She took control by pulling together a board of directors, which shifted authority away from Alishdari, the festival's talkative founder. Eventually the board voted to cut off all ties to him.

In February, Streich was at a meeting at the United Nations with an official interested in the Japanese film festivals when her cell phone and laptop went crazy with messages. Alishdari had been charged in U.S. District Court in Manhattan with money laundering, fraud — and supporting terrorism activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan with a \$25,000 donation.

"I was in a tailspin for two weeks," says Streich. "I couldn't talk to anybody."

Eventually, she realized that the news was just another hurdle.

"Every year, with this festival, there has been a reason to give up," she says. "But every year, there's always been something to keep me going. This year is no exception."

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## Coming Friday

Learn more about the Global Peace Film Festival and get reviews of selected festival films Friday in Calendar and at [OrlandoSentinel.com/movies](http://OrlandoSentinel.com/movies).