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**FIRST+MAIN FILMS ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF THE
2021 BETTER CITIES FILM FESTIVAL**

The Rural Studio and The Place That Makes Us win top honors.

31 OCTOBER 2021, DETROIT, MI - Today First+Main Films announced the winning films from the 2021 Better Cities Film Festival. The Grand Prize Best Feature Film award goes to *The Place That Makes Us*, directed by Karla Murthy, an inspiring portrait of the people of Youngstown, Ohio, who have chosen to rebuild instead of abandon their hometown. The Grand Prize Best Short Film award goes to *The Rural Studio*, a documentary by Jeff Durkin about the transformative work of architecture teachers and students in a small Alabama town.

The Hero Award, which honors a filmmaker exemplifying the power of storytelling and film to further the cause of better cities, was given to Sena Mourad Friedman, director of *Zip Code Matters*. A first time filmmaker, *Friedman's* documentary explores the intersections of race, urban planning, and the environment. The 2021 Audience Award was given to "My Child's K-5 School Journey in Detroit" directed by Dara Hill. The short film gave a new lens to one of the key issues in retaining families in the city: the quality of the education the kids are receiving. The festival audience engaged with the director in a lively post-film Q&A conversation about the role of education opportunities in making better cities. Finally, a new top award was inaugurated this year, the Best Web Series Award. The 2021 award went to *Good Hood Stories* for their informative series on South African cities.

Top awards were also given to the best films in the following categories: Better Environment - *Résilience Urbaine*; Better Planning & Design - *Ballyfermot Play Park*; Better Transport – *Langa Bicycle Hub*; Better Communities – *Lakota in America*; Better Economies For All - *Eastpoint Project*; Better Technology & Innovation - *Draw Me A Swallow*.

“We congratulate all the filmmakers, the award-winners and those that received official selection honors,” said Josh Paget, director of the festival. “We’re very proud to give these stories a platform, and thrilled to return to the theatre and gather people for this experience.”

The 2021 winners of the In Focus Awards are: Best Student Film: *Vaka*; Best Civic Story:

Taking Poletown; Best Human Story: Sounding the Alarm: America's Climate Crisis; Emerging Ideas Award: Pretty Vacant; Urban Arts Award: Alice Street; Best Architecture Film: A Symphony in Stone; Best Bicycle Film: Biking While Black; Best Housing Film: Marmalade Lane; Best COVID Cities Film: The Market; Best Tactical Urbanism Film: Precolinear Park.

The Better Cities Film Festival is an annual film festival screening the world's most inspiring stories about making cities, towns and neighborhoods better. After a six-year run in Los Angeles, Better Cities Film Festival went virtual in 2020, and returned to the theatre in 2021 at Cinema Detroit in Detroit, Michigan, October 7-10th.

“We launched Better Cities Film Festival, because we believe in the power of storytelling to inspire and empower cities and communities. The story of Detroit, and it's resilience and revitalization, is emblematic of our film festival's purpose and theme, so it's the perfect home for the Better Cities Film Festival,” said Dr. Chris Elisara, co-founder of First+Main Films.

After the flagship four-day festival in Detroit each October, the Better Cities Film Festival travels to smaller cities and towns throughout America and the world, screening the Best of Fest reel. “Better Cities Film Festival works with local governments, organizations and groups to enable communities everywhere to screen these stories and inspire conversation and change in their hometowns,” said John Paget, co-founder of First+Main Films.

Attachments: list of award winners.

Better Cities Film Festival

Better Cities Film Festival curates the best films from around the world on the theme of making cities and towns better places to work, live and play. It was originally founded in Los Angeles in 2013 by Joshua Paget, currently the festival director.

More info at: www.bettercitiesfilmfestival.com.

First+Main Films

Founded by John Paget and Chris Elisara in 2010, *First+Main Films* is a creative studio specializing in storytelling for cities, towns, and neighbourhoods through films that foster civic pride, build community and spark imagination. In 2020, *First+Main Films* began producing the *Better Cities Film Festival*.

More info at: www.firstmainfilms.com

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