Festival's longtime chief to leave job

By JULIE E. WASHINGTON
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

David W. Wittkowsky, the man at the helm of the Cleveland International Film Festival for nine years, will step down June 30.

The Cleveland Film Society's managing director, Marcie Goodman, will succeed Wittkowsky as executive director, it was announced yesterday.

Wittkowsky has been both executive director and artistic director. The society will launch an international search for a new artistic director, who should be hired within about six to nine months.

The society produces the Cleveland International Film Festival.

Wittkowsky has worked with the film society since 1984 and was named executive director in 1992.

"It's an incredibly hard decision to make, because I love this work," said Wittkowsky, 38. "I need to see what else is in the world out there for me. I know the film society is going to thrive because things are so good here, and Marcie is such a competent leader."

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Film festival chief to leave job

This year's film festival — the society's 25th — enjoyed a record-breaking attendance of more than 40,000 and sold out its opening night. It ran March 15-25 at Tower City Cinemas.

After he leaves the festival, Wittkowsky will work as a consultant for an unspecified period of time. He hopes to remain in Cleveland, even if that means taking a job outside the film industry.

Wittkowsky had been discussing the timing of his departure since late September with a small circle of intimates, including Goodman, the society's board of trustees and his companion, James Anderson.

Wittkowsky's resignation was announced at the board's executive committee meeting Tuesday. The full board ratified the decisions at a meeting yesterday morning.

David W. Wittkowsky

"My response is complete support and excitement," Goodman said.

She served as associate director of the film society from 1987 to 1994. She worked with the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art before rejoining the society as programming director in 1998.

Goodman, 46, said her background in management and development made her a less-than-ideal candidate for artistic director.

"To be artistic director, you really have to know the art form," she said.

She is looking forward to leading the society through a strategic planning project that will help the organization set future goals.

Trustees President Richard Clark said the board offered Wittkowsky options such as staying on in a different capacity or going on sabbatical. Wittkowsky asked that the discussions be postponed so that his departure would not detract from the festival's 25th anniversary year.

"David could easily have stayed on for virtually as long as he wanted to," Clark said.

The new artistic director will report to Goodman, and her former position will not be filled, he said. A salary and compensation study will determine how much the new artistic director will be paid, Clark said.

Wittkowsky earned about $62,000 as executive director, and Goodman earned $57,000, according to the society's IRS records.

The film society has an annual budget of just under $1 million and a full-time staff of six.

John Ewing, director of the Cleveland Cinematheque, credited Wittkowsky with reinvigorating the film festival.

"I think David did a terrific job. I'm sorry to see him go," Ewing said. "My gut feeling is that the festival will weather this."

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