



Bruce Saunders launched the highly successful Movie Monday when he was a patient at Eric Martin Institute.

Gardener's film series blossoms in decade at EMI

By MICHAEL D. REID
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By day, Bruce Saunders is a landscape gardener. By night, he's a movie mogul.

Ten years ago, Saunders started Movie Monday, a free weekly film series in a 100-seat theatre in the Royal Jubilee Hospital's Eric Martin Pavilion.

Aimed at patients, consumers of mental health services and the public, his Monday night movie program has blossomed as much as some of the flowers he cultivates on his day job.

"The first month I did it, I have to say, yeah, I did think it would be as successful as it is," said Saunders, 48, a former psychiatric patient at the mental health facility. "Manic depressives can imagine some pretty wonderful things."

Still, he admits he was taken by surprise when Movie Monday — designed to showcase great films, many of which dispel myths about mental illness — took on a life of its own.

Driven to distraction by the blare of talk shows and bad soap operas on "ward TV" when he was being treated for depression at EMI in 1993, Saunders began his labour of love as an alternative for patients before he went public.

"One of my ambitions has been to change people's attitudes toward mental illness," said the resourceful film buff.

While mental illness has been portrayed with sensitivity in films such as *Shine*, *Benny and Joon* and *A Beautiful Mind*, Saunders laments Hollywood's tendency to perpetuate stereotypes.

One of the worst offenders, he says, was *Me, Myself and Irene*, the Jim Carrey comedy that spoofs schizophrenia.

"We're still showing good films," said Saunders as he prepared for tonight's 10th anniversary screening of *Cannery Row* starring Nick Nolte and Debra Winger — the film that opened the series on June 14, 1993.

"But it's the collaboration I'm really pleased about. The whole thing works because the more people we collaborate with, the more people come."

Saunders recently collaborated with Dr. Harry Karlinsky of the UBC department of psychiatry, for instance. Inspired by Movie Monday, Karlinsky runs a monthly mental health film series titled *Frames of Mind* at Vancouver's Pacific Cinematheque.

Saunders was also recently contacted by a group in the U.K. requesting the use of his title for Reel Madness, the spinoff festival of mental health-themed films he started after being inspired by Toronto's *Rendezvous with Madness Festival*.

"That's something I never imagined would happen," said Saunders, who maintains a comprehensive Web site.

Movie Monday is about more than just free movies, however.

A key feature has been Saunders's lineup of guest speakers, including Dr. Dean Brooks, Superintendent of Oregon State Hospital, who was a technical adviser and played a psychiatrist in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; Zacharias Kunuk, director of *Atanarjuat*, who participated in a conference call with viewers; and screenwriter Stewart Stern (*Sybil*).

Saunders and his creative partner, Bruce Wallace, produce Movie Monday on an annual budget of about \$20,000 with the help of a Canada Council grant, corporate sponsors, various mental health associations and donations.

For more information, log on to <http://www.islandnet.com/mm/index.html> or call 595-FLIC.