

# For this duo, art imitates life

## Making 'American Movie' was 'just like hanging out'



**KENT KRIEGSHAUSER**/The Register-Mail

Mark Borchardt, left, applauds for his friend Mike Schank after reading a poem he wrote about Schank on the drive from Milwaukee to Galesburg Saturday for the Black Earth Film Festival. With them at an informal reception at Q's Cafe is Schank's wife, Kate. Their film, "American Movie," was shown at the festival.

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**BY JOHN R. PULLIAM**

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GALESBURG - Mark Borchardt and Mike Schank of "American Movie" are artists in their own right. But the special movie guests of this year's Black Earth Film Festival are sure to remind those familiar with Kevin Smith's movies of Jay and Silent Bob. At an informal reception for Borchardt, Schank and Schank's wife, Kate, Saturday afternoon at Q's Cafe, 319 E. Main St., members of the media and Knox College's Educational Development Program asked about movies and the lives of the troupe from Wisconsin. A special showing of Borchardt and Schank's "American Movie" was scheduled for Saturday night during the film festival at the Orpheum Theatre.

"American Movie" won the Grand Jury prize at the Sundance Film Festival.

Earlier in the day, Joel Ward, a member of the Black Earth Film Festival Committee, said the number of films submitted and shown and the quality of the movies improves each year. "We're hoping we'll have a good turnout tonight," he said of Saturday's showing of "American Movie." "When the movie came out, I remember seeing Mark on the Letterman show and I thought, 'wow, what a real human being.' "

Borchardt is tall and lanky, similar to Jason Mewes who plays Jay in Kevin Smith movies, such as "Dogma." With his long, stringy hair, only the oversized glasses and goatee interfere with the Mewes look. Schank, meanwhile, is shorter and stocky, much like Smith, who plays Silent Bob. With his long hair and full beard, Schank, like Silent Bob, has less to say than his cohort, although his bright purple, tie-dyed Jimi Hendrix T-shirt prevented him fading into the background.

As Borchardt and Schank took questions from the group eating a buffet set out by Q's, Borchardt was told it was amazing how comfortable everyone seemed to be in "American Movie." He also was complimented for seeming to be, in person, the same person he was in the movie.

"It was just like hanging out," Borchardt said, through a mouthful of food. "It was just natural stuff. I'm actually quiet. But it would be bizarre to be morose with 20 people sitting around" in the restaurant.

According to a review in the New York Times, "American Movie" "is an intimate portrait of Borchardt, his family and his determination to make a feature film called 'Northwestern,' despite a lack of money, resources or apparent talent."

The documentary was directed by Chris Smith and was made with the help of money from an uncle and other family members. Looking like the stereotypical slacker, Borchardt was asked what his reaction was the first time he saw the movie.

"I have no clue what I was thinking back then," he said. "I have short-term memory problems on some things." Asked if anything was off limits to Smith and co-producer Sarah Price, Borchardt answered, "No. I don't know. I was drunk the whole time."

Borchardt and Schank have known each other for 17 years. "I had a pretty bad taste for vodka and no one else craved vodka like Mark did," Schank said of how the two got together. However, Schank, who performed all the music for American movie, has been clean and sober for more than four years, according to the "American Movie" Web site.

Schank, who has a serious side, said the reaction to the movie at Sundance "was better than I expected." In fact, he admitted he did not have high hopes for the movie in its initial stages.

"I thought we'd have this videocassette, like when friends came over," he said, saying how surprised he was when they won an award.

The Black Earth Film Festival, which began Thursday, concludes today.