

NFB seeks women storytellers



From left, NDG resident and director general of Studio XX, Paulina Abarca-Cantin, and Kat Baulu, a Westmounter and producer with the NFB.

BY ISAAC OLSON

Two collaborating organizations, headed by two women with Westmount ties, have established a unique proposal for a competition that will eventually give six Quebec-based, woman-led teams the funding needed to use modern multimedia tools to tell a story.

First Person Digital (FPD) is an initiative created by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and the Plateau Mont Royal-based Studio XX – Canada's only media art centre focused on women and technology. Kat Baulu, a Westmounter and producer with the NFB's Quebec Centre, is co-heading the project with the director general of Studio XX, Paulina Abarca-Cantin, a former Westmounter turned NDGer.

Studio XX, NFB and Canadian Heritage are financial partners producing an English-language media competition that incorporates women and modern technology. Contestants might choose, for example, to use the internet, smart phones or even video games to tell their tale. The call for proposals ends on March 1 and, so far, more than 40 teams have already sent in project ideas.

Describing the partnership between Studio XX and the NFB as a fitting means to explore multimedia story-telling by women in a profession often dominated by men, Baulu said concepts will ideally be socially-driven from a woman's point of view.

"At first, humans told stories verbally,

and then we learned how to write them down," said Baulu. "Eventually we had books and then audio books. What happens when you have a new tool like a mobile phone or the web? How can you tell stories in a different way that is a special experience that you don't have just reading off a page?"

FPD is a way for different artists from around Quebec to try out different story-telling tools, continued Baulu. While traditional storytelling techniques will be accepted, the aim of the project is to find new, innovative methods. After passing through two jury panels, six final candidates will be chosen to bring their project to life with a \$25,000 budget.

"It's new to all of us," said Baulu. "That's what makes this project so exciting. You get a chance to experiment in all new territories. It gets everybody excited and nervous all at the same time."

The six projects will be selected by a jury comprising of industry professionals. The finished projects, which will be due by the end of September, will then premier at Studio XX's HTMiles Festival in November 2010. The projects will eventually be distributed by the NFB and other organizations.

"Media in the world is changing and funding is changing in our country and around the world," said Abarca-Cantin. "For now, this is a model that we think will work. In three years, who knows what the iPad will bring?" For more information visit www.firstpersondigital.ca.

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