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Images: High resolution available upon request.

Award-Winning Documentary "Saving Walden's World" to Screen at 29th United Nations Association Film Festival (UNAFF) in East Palo Alto

EAST PALO ALTO, California - October 2026 - The United Nations Association Film Festival (UNAFF) will host a special free festival screening of *Saving Walden's World* on **Wednesday, October 21, 2026, at 3:40 PM** at the Eastside Theater at Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto, California, as part of the 29th annual festival held under the theme *PASSION FOR CHANGE*.

The screening comes on the heels of the film's official acceptance for national distribution on PBS via NETA, a major milestone for this independent documentary.

Saving Walden's World has screened at 23 international film festivals across four continents and won 14 awards, with selections ranging from the Maine Outdoor Film Festival and Vermont Film Festival to the Love & Hope International Film Festival in Barcelona, Crown Wood International Film Festival in Kolkata, Puerto Aventuras International Film Festival in Mexico, and Five Continents International Film Festival in Venezuela. The film was also presented in New York City as part of the United Nations Summit of the Future. This October, it screens in California at the Awareness Film Festival in Santa Monica on October 15 before heading to UNAFF on October 21.

The production team includes Academy Award-winning filmmaker Deborah Shaffer, who directed the Cuba segments; four-time Emmy winner Bob Maraist, cinematographer and co-producer; Kerala cinematographer David Wright, whose honors include a BAFTA and an Emmy; and editors Nyneve Minnear (*Little Richard: I Am Everything*) and Mickey Green (winner of five Emmys and a Peabody).

The film follows Jim Merkel, a former military engineer turned sustainability activist, as he raises his son, Walden, on an off-grid homestead in Maine and travels to Kerala (India), Cuba, and Slovenia to document women-led solutions that have successfully bypassed the growth trap of the West. By prioritizing literacy, healthcare, and reproductive freedom, these societies have built stability and equity without sacrificing quality of life.

The film's inciting incident takes place in **California**, capturing Jim's ethical crisis in the late 1980s while working as a military arms dealer for TRW. That awakening sparked a decades-long journey of redemption. He shifted his life to peace, indigenous rights and bike activism in San Luis Obispo volunteering with ECOSLO, the Sierra Club and Passion for Peace.

“We document societies that made college free for all, including the poorest women, over 60 years ago,” states Merkel. “When a 15-year-old girl knows her dreams to be an engineer, educator, doctor, or businesswoman won’t burden her family, her entire life changes in beautiful ways.”

The East Palo Alto screening is presented as part of the *100 Rooms. 1 Story.* campaign, *Saving Walden's World*'s screening tour bringing the film directly to communities across North America.

Following the free screening, director Jim Merkel will lead an in-person Q&A with the audience. Additionally, Merkel will participate in UNAFF’s official panel discussion, “In Search of Solutions During Wartime,” on Friday, October 23, at 5:30 PM at the Mitchell Park Community Center in Palo Alto.

Event Details:

- **WHO:** *Saving Walden's World* - Directed by Jim Merkel
- **WHEN:** Wednesday, October 21, 2026 | 3:40 PM PT (Session 17)
- **WHERE:** Eastside Theater, Eastside College Preparatory School, 1041 Myrtle St, East Palo Alto, CA 94303
- **HOST:** 29th United Nations Association Film Festival (UNAFF)
- **TICKET:** Free Admission - No Registration Required
- **MEDIA CONTACT:** Jim Merkel | jimmerkel@savingwaldensworld.com | (207) 323-1474
- **WEBSITE:** savingwaldensworld.org
- **TRAILER:** https://youtu.be/an4LqG9mLlM

Note to editors: This release is ready to run as submitted. High-resolution images and additional background available upon request.

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UNAFF (United Nations Association Film Festival) is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization celebrating documentary films that address human rights, environmental issues, social justice, and international peace.