

## **Radford News Journal - Wednesday, November 30, 2011**

### **Radford Writers Win Screenwriting Competition**

*Heather Bell*

RICHMOND — The Virginia Film Office has announced the winners of the 2011 Virginia Screenwriting Competition, and they include a duo from Radford.

Neil Harvey and Heather Harvey from Radford have won the competition for their screenplay “Hazel Hollow,” the true crime story of the murder of Gina Hall and subsequent trial of Steve Epperly in Pulaski County.

In 1980, Epperly was convicted of the first-degree murder of Hall, an 18-year-old Radford University student. He received a life sentence. Neither Hall's body nor a weapon was ever found. There were no eyewitnesses to the killing; and Epperly never confessed. Thus, the case was entirely circumstantial.

Epperly met the victim at a nightclub in Blacksburg and she subsequently accompanied him to a friend's lake house. Her car, clothing and bloodstained towels known to have been at the lake house were later found near the New River. Epperly's conviction was the first murder conviction in Virginia without a body and was upheld on appeal.

Neil Harvey has been a reporter for The Roanoke Times since 2001, covering crime, courts and local government. Heather Harvey has been a practicing attorney for nearly 20 years and serves as corporate counsel for a company based in Richmond.

In a statement released by the Virginia Film Office, the Harveys said the win is an honor.

“Hazel Hollow tells a story that is unique to our home state, and the backdrop of southwestern Virginia is as much a character as any other in the script,” they said. “For these reasons, it is a special honor to have our screenplay recognized by the Virginia Film Office.”

The Virginia Screenwriting Competition was created by the Virginia Film Office to “celebrate the accomplishments of Virginia writers, as well as to promote the future of filmmaking in Virginia,” according to a statement released about the competition. “It provides screenwriters with a forum for their work and an opportunity to present their scripts to decision makers in the film industry.”

The full-length screenplays are evaluated by a panel of Virginia judges. Finalists from the first round are then sent to a second panel comprised of professionals in the film or television industry. The competition is held annually and is open to Virginia residents. The majority of the script must take place in Virginia or at locations which could reasonably be found in Virginia.

The winners were presented with their awards during the 2011 Virginia Film Festival in Charlottesville.