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ENTERTAINMENT

14:55 AEDT Thu 25 Mar 2004

Stars unite to promote Aussie films

A powerful coalition of Australians including Nicole Kidman, Mel Gibson, Russell Crowe and Naomi Watts are helping promote homegrown films and help new Aussie talent in Hollywood.

The 34 actors and directors have signed up to be ambassadors of the Los Angeles-based non-profit organisation Australians in Film.

Australians in Film holds regular screenings in Los Angeles of Australian-made movies and those involving Australian actors, directors and crew.

Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, Hugh Jackman, Phillip Noyce, Heath Ledger, Eric Bana and Anthony LaPaglia have also signed up to be ambassadors.

"Everyone knows how tough a struggle it can be to make it in Hollywood and, as an Australian, I'm very appreciative of the fact that Australians in Film not only showcases the work of those of us who have enjoyed some success, but also the work of up-and-coming talent from our country," Kidman said.

Formerly known as the Los Angeles Australian Film and Television Association (LAAFTA), the organisation was revamped and renamed earlier this year.

LAAFTA was founded in May 2001.

"The response to various screenings and events organised by LAAFTA during the past three years confirmed that there is overwhelming interest in Australian films and talent in Hollywood, so now we feel it is appropriate to take the next step by restructuring and renaming our group," said LA-based AusFILM commissioner and LAAFTA co-founder David Pratt.

"The response of high-profile Australian talent in support of this move has been tremendous."

In January, the organisation co-presented the Jurlique Australian Film Festival in Los Angeles and held screenings of Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, Adam Elliot's Oscar-winning animated short film *Harvie Krumpet*, and the world premiere of *Strange Bedfellows*, starring Paul Hogan and Michael Caton.

Also slated are screenings of Ledger's *Ned Kelly*, and *Gettin' Square* starring David Wenham.

Planning is also underway for a "major event" to be held during the American summer.

Other ambassadors include Gillian Armstrong, Simon Baker, Toni Collette, Deborah Lee Furness, Melissa George, Scott Hicks, Barry Humphries, Julian McMahon, Jacqueline McKenzie, Kylie Minogue, Radha Mitchell, Poppy Montgomery, Olivia Newton-John, Frances O'Connor, Miranda Otto, Guy Pearce, Fred Schepisi, Hugo

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