



Talk of the Townie

by Rick Ohler

An Occasional Feature in the

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Tim Buchanan's *Long Trail Out*

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In roughly 60 years of going to the Aurora Theatre, I don't think I had ever seen a standing ovation at the end of a movie. Until last Saturday, that is.

When the last frames of Shai Ben-Dor's new documentary, *The Long Trail Out*, scrolled down the screen, the audience of 300 or so erupted in spontaneous applause.



Then they stood in unison to praise the beautifully done film about one man's struggle to find the freedom only coming out as a gay man could bring.

The film's subject is Tim Buchanan, 72, lifelong East Auroran from the Class of 1964, most well-known for his work with young people at the Boys and Girls Club of East Aurora, at a travel agency that organized school trips and, most recently with Trail Camp, a program he founded to teach kids about hiking, climbing and respect the outdoors. You can begin to see the dilemma he faced as a man who loved working with kids, but who had a secret he could not share with parents or society for fear of the backlash that would occur. Recall the social climate regarding homosexuality that existed in the 1970s when he began his career at the club, or in the '80s as he rose to the status of icon in the community, mentoring young people who were facing their own challenges of adolescence. Imagine the consequences he might have faced if he had come out then. Sadly, we have to admit that he probably would have

lost his job. So he sought comfort in the mountains where he could be himself. And he kept his secret to himself. Until 2016, when he was 70 years old.

At the screening last Saturday, when I told Buchanan that his hometown newspaper would have a story about the film, he asked me not to make my *Advertiser* story about him. Since he's out of the self-imposed, society-imposed closet and moving forward, he wanted me to concentrate on the young people who made the movie and the career he hopes they will have as a result of *The Long Trail Out*.

Let's start in 2012, freshman year at Ithaca College for EAHS graduate Larkin Bohanan and Shai Ben-Dor from Hudson Valley. Bohanan had been part of Buchanan's Trail Camp during high school, hiking and climbing mountains in the East and the West, culminating in an attempt to conquer the peak of Mt. Shasta in Oregon. As Ben-Dor explained, the two became friends that year running cross-country, and eventually he connected with Buchanan on visits to East Aurora and Tim's visit to Ithaca. Eventually, Buchanan felt it was time to share his secret with his climbing protégés (all of whom are heterosexual, by the way), and as he had hoped, they were supportive of him. Then one night Ben-Dor, a budding photographer and filmmaker said he would take Tim's story and make it a movie, not so much to highlight one man's journey but to help those of all ages who were on a similar journey. After a moment of thought, Tim agreed.

Thus began two years of hard work. Ben-Dor, serving as cinematographer, director and editor, assembled a team of Ithaca College class of 2016 students with Bohanan as one producer and mule (equipment hauler), Robert Adler and Alex Schneider as co-producers, Matthew Mikkelson handling the sound recording and Eric Bass editing the sound. Zach Keller, a 2011 Ithaca graduate designed and is maintaining the website. Ben-Dor put up a Gofundme page since no one in the venture would realize any pay during the making of the documentary. He was astounded by the support he received from Tim's supporters, but also from supporters of the cause.

The film centers around a climb that Bohanan, Ben-Dor and Buchanan undertook in the White Mountains, attempting the nine summits of the Presidential Trail. Interspersed in the dramatic, spectacular footage of that climb, which included pristine beauty and near hurricane force winds, rain and hail, Buchanan, who serves as the film's narrator, talks about the pain of being different and having to pretend otherwise. He talked about the nervousness of coming out to his family several years ago, and then to selected confidants before deciding that the time had come for all to know. Buchanan, whose career as a youth worker is almost universally celebrated, says at one point in the film, "I figure I was running at about 80%, having to spend the rest covering my feelings. I always wondered what I could have accomplished if I hadn't felt the need to hide."

The film also includes comments from several of those who know him best including Tim brothers, Trail Camp member, parents and my brother, Michael, for whom Tim was a surrogate father after our own father died when Mike was 11.

Technically, the film was wonderful, a testimony to the team's dedication in taking 63 hours of footage and distilling it into about 26 minutes of a documentary that is of such quality that it will be entered into the Banff Film Festival in October.

Metaphor is nearly impossible to ignore when a film takes place in the mountains and follows one man's challenge as he summits his own mountains. And metaphor, by its nature, takes one image and lets it apply to the world at large. In his remarks after the film, Tim pressed us all to make a difference, to give prejudice, bigotry and bullying no place in our lives and to call out those who cause others pain. He hoped that his story would resonate with those in school and beyond.

The crowd, while jubilant in its appreciation of the film, also reflected the spiritual depth of the message. John Ketcham, who hurried back from Maine after through-hiking the 2200-mile Appalachian Trail to attend the premiere, rose from his seat to say that he would never have attempted, let alone accomplished his feat without the influence of Tim Buchanan.

The crowd in the theatre included Tim's family, many of his high school classmates, past members from his Boys and Girls Club days, hikers, youngsters, some of whom had travelled thousands of miles. And the community at large came, too, in great numbers, doing what we do best: taking care of our own.

Visit www.thelongtrailout.com to view the trailer and to read testimonials. You will be moved.