Documentary to be shown on PBS, in theatres and lawmaker offices

After a modest private screening for 15 people at The Loft Cinema last fall, the documentary, “Missing in Brooks County,” came roaring back into Tucson as a headliner for the Arizona International Film Festival on April 20 for a rare, in-person screening at the MSA Annex Festival Grounds.

School of Theatre, Film & Television Adjunct Instructor Lisa Molomot co-directed the film with Jeff Bemiss and TFTV Associate Professor Jacob Bricca ACE was editor and producer. The film has been screened at over 20 prestigious film festivals, earned numerous “Best Documentary Awards” and garnered national and international media coverage.

Plans are underway for the next wave of publicity to amplify the film’s message.

> Watch the trailer | Schedule for upcoming screenings

The film will continue screening in film festivals, in theatre beginning in August, and on over 300 PBS stations in the fall via Independent Lens.

Plus, filmmakers are working with border policy advocates (ACLU, WOLA, etc.) to facilitate introductions with lawmakers.

“We are beginning to work on the impact campaign which means getting the film in front of lawmakers in order to make meaningful change,” said Molomot. “These deaths have been happening for almost three decades. It’s time.”

The film follows the stories of two families searching for their loved ones who went missing in the fields of Brooks County, Texas, and chronicles the consequences of decades-long U.S. border policy.

*The New York Times* reported on one consequence: 642 migrant deaths from 2009-2019 with bodies or skeletal remains discovered in Brooks County, a fraction of the border-wide total. Another consequence: thousands of unsolved missing person cases over the decades.

“The film is even more relevant now than four months ago,” Molomot said, referencing the change in U.S. Presidents last January. “Many more migrants are coming to the U.S. from Latin America, and as a result, the number of deaths has gone up. This is usually the case when a Democrat is president. Summer is the worst season because it’s so hot in South Texas. I think a lot people working in this are very concerned right now.”

Brooks County has a large customs and border patrol checkpoint 70 miles north of the border that serves as a second border for entry into the United States and is the epicenter of migrant deaths in Texas.

Immigration reform passed in 1994 is driving the crisis in Brooks County. Titled “Prevention Through Deterrence,” the theory by policy makers is that migrants would be deterred from attempting to cross the border by funneling them into the most dangerous areas of the borderlands. That was the theory, but that hasn’t been the reality.

The film strives to show viewers how the broken immigration system and the reality of that border policy impacts individuals and a community. Filmmakers visited the county 15 times over five years to track individual stories to capture and present a sense of what it is like to live in Brooks County on a daily basis with vérité footage.

The result is a gripping drama, but also a deeply humane of ordinary people: human rights workers, activists, immigrants and law enforcement agents.
"This is not the first documentary about the immigration crisis," writes Boston Globe film critic Peter Keough in his review of the film, "but it's one of the most nuanced and disturbing ... The filmmakers tell the stories with restraint, emphasizing the injustices, cruelty, and suffering without needless, manipulative exaggeration."

>> More information on the film, filmmakers

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