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## Film Spotlights Immigration Policy

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SALT LAKE CITY, Jan. 25, 2006

### Quote

**"It was not our intention to vilify anyone. U.S. border policy is not serving anyone at this point."**

Joseph Mathew

**(AP)** After a boisterous 2004 convention aimed at rallying support for an Arizona proposition to combat voter fraud among undocumented immigrants, a Mexico native wheels a cart into the hotel ballroom to clean up.

In meek, broken English he says he has no problem with the people expressing their views, but when they talk about kicking sick immigrant children out of hospitals it bothers him.

Such is the dilemma presented in Joseph Mathew's documentary, "**Crossing Arizona**," which examines both sides of the immigration debate in Arizona with an eye toward showing the failings of U.S. immigration policy. The film is in the documentary competition of the **Sundance Film Festival**, which runs through Sunday.

Mathew, a former photojournalist who was an occasional freelance photographer for The Associated Press in Baltimore several years ago, said he was drawn to the issue after hearing about the humanitarian crisis Arizona was facing as it became a major immigration thoroughfare in the mid-1990s.

Two immigration policies Operation Hold the Line in 1993 and Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 heightened security near the urban centers of El Paso, Texas, and San Diego, respectively. That, the film shows, left illegal immigrants with only one option, traveling for days through one of the most unforgiving environments on the continent, the Southwest's Sonoran Desert. It is estimated that 4,500 undocumented people try to cross the desert each day. The U.S.

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Border Patrol tallied a record 253 immigrant deaths in 2005 in Arizona.

It is in that harsh landscape that Mathew found the groups of people who embody the immigration dilemma. They are both the humanitarian organizations that fill water tanks hoping to save lives and the members of the burgeoning "Minuteman" movement made up of citizens taking the fight against illegal immigration into their own hands.

"The initial focus was trying to cover the humanitarian crisis in Arizona," Mathew said. But as he watched the voter-fraud ballot measure, Proposition 200, heat up in the state and saw vigilante border-watcher Chris Simcox's group gain national attention, the political debate became an integral part of the story, he said.

"When we first met Chris Simcox he was really nobody," Mathew said. "Suddenly he's on CNN with Lou Dobbs. It was this incredible story happening right before our eyes. This thing we were covering locally became a huge national story."

**Continued**

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By Debbie Hummel

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(AP)

The power of the debate continues to follow the film, Mathew said. On Mathew's invitation several of the documentary's subjects have traveled to the festival to be part of the question-and-answer sessions that follow each screening. Among them is Mike Wilson, a member of the Tohono O'odham American Indian tribe, who is shown in the film stashing gallons of water around the tribe's reservation which abuts the Arizona-Mexico border. He does this work on behalf of the aid organization Humane Borders, whose workers aren't allowed on the reservation, and against the wishes of his own tribe.

Simcox attended the first screening of the film Friday and brought some Minutemen with him, Mathew said.

"The Q-and-A was really heated," he said. "Sundance is such a filmmaker's festival, but there wasn't one question about how the film was made."

Mathew said he began filming in February 2004, the last shooting took place in November 2005 and some news clips were being added just weeks ago. "We wanted to make it as current as possible," he said.

The documentary shows several scenes from the 2004 presidential election; the front lines of the fight against the Arizona proposition, which passed, and from floor debate in the U.S. House of Representatives as it passed a bill to toughen border enforcement in December. The bill is expected to be taken up by the U.S. Senate next month.

But amid the political debate are the scenes of real people dealing with the effects of immigration policy:

A man comes out of the brush to flag down Wilson, who is hiding water on the reservation. The immigrant says he's been separated from the rest of his group,

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doesn't know where he is and has little food or water. As Wilson explains that the best thing for the man to do is head to the highway and go willingly with Border Patrol agents when they spot him, the immigrant breaks down in tears. He tells Wilson and the camera that his wife needs surgery that he can't afford. Then, he heads off, dejected, toward the highway.

Ranchers along the border show the impact that illegal immigrants have on their land. One rancher, Phil Krentz, estimates that he's lost more than \$1 million over the years on escaped and lost cattle, rebuilding damaged fences and cleaning up garbage so his cows don't eat it and die.

A farmer talks on camera with his face obscured as dozens of illegal immigrants pick peppers behind him. He fears immigration agents will deport his employees. "If we lose these guys we lose a whole week" of harvesting. It's enough to ruin him, he says.

It's these vignettes, on both sides of the debate, that give the documentary its heft.

"It was not our intention to vilify anyone. U.S. border policy is not serving anyone at this point," Mathew said.

By Debbie Hummel

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