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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 7/12/23**

**WHAT:** Premiere and Reception of ***People of the Crossing: The Jews of El Paso****,*

**WHEN:** Sunday, July 23rd 2023 @ 1PM

**WHERE:** Plaza Classic Film Festival, Plaza Theater,  **https://plazaclassic.com**

**TRAILER & PHOTOS**: **cinewest.net**

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***People of the Crossing: The Jews of El Paso*** is the fifth in a series of documentaries focusing on the Jewish Experience along the U.S. - Mexico Borderlands aired on regional and national PBS and directed by Isaac Artenstein. This multi-layered portrait of a Texas border Jewish community is told through family stories that take us through the culture, customs and history of this important gateway between continents, people, and languages.

We learn from descendants of 19th Century Jewish pioneers, current community leaders, artists and historians about the uniqueness of Jewish El Paso, with its multicultural congregations made up of European, American, Mexican and Middle Eastern Jews. Their testimonials are richly illustrated with historic photographs, film footage, and compelling cinematography from land and air highlighting El Paso’s geographic location at the foot of the Franklin Mountains, and by the shores of the Rio Grande.

El Paso was noted for having the largest Jewish community between Houston and San Diego before WW2. Temple Mt. Sinai was founded in 1898 and the B’Nai Zion Synagogue in 1900. Rabbi Joseph Roth, who officiated during the depression with little pay, also worked at El Paso College of Mines (now UTEP) as chairman of the Philosophy and Psychology Departments, and Rabbi Floyd Fierman was a noted author and historian of Jewish Communities in the Southwest.

With the introduction of U.S. Immigration quotas in 1924, many Jews landed in Mexican ports. Some settled in Jewish communities there, while others journeyed north to join their families in the U.S. with the help of organizations such as the Jewish Women’s Committee headed by Fanny Zablovsky. Rabbi Zielonka of Temple M. Sinai, also worked tirelessly to help Jewish refugees, sometimes meeting them at the docks in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico in the 1920s. At the end of WW2, El Paso also provided a home and a new life for many Holocaust survivors, as documented at the El Paso Holocaust Museum.

Deborah (Feinberg) Rosen, Hal Marcus, Susan Novick, Jerry Rubin, Peter Svarzbein and others recount the adventure and drama of their families fleeing persecution and economic duress in Europe to find refuge in a desert oasis where they were welcomed to settle, raise families and contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of El Paso. They also recall how El Paso and Juarez were almost the same city, with great ease in crossing and daily interaction between both communities.

Adolph Schwartz, opened The Popular Department Store in 1902, which was very representative of Jewish mercantile history in downtown El Paso. Stuart and Lee Schwartz, Adolph’s descendants, relate the history of one the most successful family-owned stores in the Southwest and share stories of Pancho Villa shopping there for uniforms and supplies for his troops during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. For over 90 years, The Popularserved customers from both sides of the border, employing many Mexican Americans, and the first to hire African American clerks.

Current B’Nai Zion President, Felicia Rubin demonstrates for the camera her family’s recipe for brisket, and serves it in a traditional Shabbat dinner for the grand-finale of ***People of the Crossing*** with documentary’s participants enjoying brisket tacos topped with home-made salsa, accompanied by refried beans and kosher red wine.

**The Director:** Isaac Artenstein founded Cinewest Productions with his wife, Judith Artenstein to create documentaries and indie features such as “Break of Dawn” which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, and the romantic comedy, “Love Always” directed by Judith. Isaac also produced the comedy “A Day Without a Mexican” and created internationally aired documentaries such as “Ballad of an Unsung Hero” and “The Journeys of Harry Crosby,” broadcast simultaneously on PBS and Canal 22 (Mexico’s Cultural TV).  He’s currently producing “Border Noir” and teaching film at UCSD.  “People of the Crossing: The Jews of El Paso,” premiering at the El Paso Classic Film Festival is part of his “Jews of the Borderlands” series which includes “Tijuana Jews,” “Challah Rising in the Desert: The Jews of New Mexico,” “To the Ends of the Earth: A Portrait of Jewish San Diego” and “A Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest”

**The Production Team:**  Cinematography by Sergio Ulloa, Edited By Philippe Goldstein, Music by Allan Phillips, Mark Adler and Jaime Valle, Associate Producer Romaree Friedman Herbert, Co-Produced by Judith Artenstein, Produced and Directed by Isaac Artenstein