LOCAL NEWS

Film festival tells tales of immigrants

By Kate Larsen
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As the national debate over immigration policy heats up, a film festival in Longmont is telling the stories of people caught in the middle of the fight.

The inaugural Multicultural Film Festival continues through May at the Longmont Museum and Cultural Center and Longmont Library. From Mexicans searching for work to an Afghan seeking asylum, the films show people’s journeys to the United States and other countries.

“This is a way to educate the community on an issue facing many of our clients,” said Carolyn Slauson, of El Comite, the Longmont nonprofit that’s co-sponsoring the film festival with the city.

Slauson said the films can help viewers understand why some people leave their homes and families for a new country, and the challenges they face along the way.

Several of the films have won accolades. Two are Sundance Film Festival winners, and one was Mexico’s official selection for the 2006 Oscars.

Tonight’s film is “Hold Your Breath.” The movie tells the story of Mohammad Kochi, who fled Afghanistan in 1979 during the Soviet invasion. He settled in northern California and was hit with another hurdle in his late 50s: cancer.

The film’s director, Dr. Marlen Grainger-Monsen, said she was motivated by racial disparities in health care. But the film goes beyond health issues, said Grainger-Monsen, a senior research scholar and director of the Biomedical Ethics in Film program at Stanford University.

“It’s really about communication between cultures and about the assumptions we make about each other on both sides,” she said.