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**DEARBORN / DEARBORN HEIGHTS**

**Weekend Edition**

# HERITAGE PRESS & GUIDE

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HERITAGE NEWSPAPERS / PRESS & GUIDE

## New Keith Famie documentary, 'Our Arab-American Story,' puts spotlight on Dearborn

By Katie Hetrick  
Press & Guide Newspapers

### DEARBORN

Dearborn plays a prominent role in a new documentary about Arab Americans living in the Detroit area.

A special premiere screening of "Our Arab-American Story" will be held today at Rock Financial Showplace in Novi. Tickets are \$125.

The documentary will debut to the public without commercials at 7 p.m. Dec. 15 on WXYZ-TV Channel 7.

The movie is the fourth documentary about

Detroit-area immigrant groups produced and directed by Keith Famie of Visionalist Entertainment Productions. Famie may be better remembered as a former "Survivor" contestant and star of "Keith Famie's Adventures," where he traveled the world for the Food Network.

Famie, a chef by training, said perhaps it is his love of food that has drawn him to travel extensively.

"I've always had a fascination of different cultures around the world," he said.

Likewise, he has always marveled at immigrants.

"I've always been fasci-

nated by people who came to America with nothing," Famie said. Many people decide to make a new life for themselves in America with little money, education or family to support them.

Famie's combined fascination with culture and immigrants has led to a series of documentaries about regional immigrant communities, including Italians, Greeks and Poles.

But even with three similar projects under his belt, Famie was jittery about examining the Arab-American community.

"I was nervous going into it," he said. "I was really stepping into unfamiliar

territory."

The first three communities had many similarities, including a common religion and a single home country.

Arab Americans represent two major faiths and 22 different homelands.

In the post-9-11 world, the term "Arab American" also has a lot of emotional and political connotations the other groups did not.

"Directing this, I became somewhat an ambassador for the community," Famie said. He said he felt honored by how those in the community trusted him to tell their story. Then he



Photo courtesy Visionalist Entertainment  
Keith Famie poses with Officer Bazzi of the Dearborn Police Department during his late night ride-along video shoot.

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Photo courtesy Visionalist Entertainment  
Keith Famie and his crew film the ribbon cutting ceremony at the 2007 Arab American Festival in Dearborn. Famie recently completed a documentary film about the Arab American community in Metro Detroit and throughout the world.





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### Famie

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was even more nervous about how the piece would turn out because of "the responsibility of what I was doing and what the community — the business leaders of the community — were allowing me to do," he said.

He thinks the documentary came out well. He had more than 80 hours of film to whittle down for the program.

"It's amazing. It's really, really good," Famie said.

"Our Arab-American Story" is better, he thinks, than his first documentary in the series, "Our Italian Story," which won Visionalist three Michigan Emmy awards.

The newest program tries to answer such things as who is an Arab American, where are they from and why did they come to America, Famie said. It will also provide an overview of the Muslim religion.

Dr. Marwan Abouljoud allowed Famie's crew to follow him back to Lebanon where he visited his parents during Ramadan. On this side of the ocean, Abouljoud is director of the Henry Ford Transplant Institute, the nation's busiest transplant center. The documentary also captures part of Abouljoud's 26th successful transplant.

"I thought it was an important part of the documentary to show that these are Arab Americans," said

Famie, who hoped to break some stereotypes about the culture.

"Our Arab-American Story" does not have a narrator, and Famie said he started filming without a clear notion of what he expected to include.

"What you end up with is a lot of voices telling one story," Famie said.

He filmed in Dubai, Jordan and Lebanon.

"We filmed extensively in Dearborn," Famie added.

He also talked to people at Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services and the Arab American Chamber of Commerce. The Arab American National Museum served as the backdrop for a number of interviews.

"Every person in Detroit — non Arab American — should go there," he said of the museum. "I hope they benefit greatly from (the documentary)."

In another month or two, Famie hopes to have the documentary and several other hours of footage available for sale on the Web site, [www.ourstoryof.com](http://www.ourstoryof.com). One disc in the two-disc package will focus just on the museum, he said.

He has plans for more documentaries on Indian, Japanese and Jewish communities in the Detroit area.

"Detroit is the most diverse city in America," Famie said, adding he was sure it would compare with the likes of New York. (In

New York City, 37 percent of residents were born in a foreign country, compared to 12 percent in Wayne County, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.) Famie, though, said Census figures show 128 languages are spoken in Michigan.

The Arab-American community is a beautiful example about how these different groups can get along, he said.

"This is a lesson for the world. This is a lesson for humanity," Famie said. He hoped people would tune in to see the debut.

"It's a beautiful documentary about a community," he said.

For those who want to attend the special premiere, tickets can be obtained by calling Visionalist Entertainment at (248) 869-0096.

Today's screening event will include food from Bint Jebail, Yasmeen Bakery, Ellie's Birmingham and the Epoch Restaurant Group. Lebanese wines will be provided by Chateau Ksar.



Photo courtesy Visionalist Entertainment

Keith Famie and his crew filming at the Memorial Day Parade outside the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn. Footage from around the city can be seen in Famie's new documentary, "Our Arab-American Story."