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EIU Filmmakers' Documentary to Mark One-Year Anniversary of Oil Spill

Apr-11-2011

An Eastern Illinois University filmmaking team's documentary about the BP oil spill will make its big-screen and television debuts to mark the one-year anniversary of the Gulf Coast disaster.

The big-screen premiere of "Returning to Paradise: Voices of the Human Spirit" will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 17, in Buzzard Auditorium in EIU's Buzzard Hall. Filmmakers will be present to discuss the project.

The one-hour documentary will then air on WEIU-TV at 6 p.m. Wednesday, April 20 -- a year to the day after the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil-drilling rig.

"Returning to Paradise: Voices of the Human Spirit," co-directed by EIU faculty member Cameron Craig and EIU student Zach Nugent, documents the impact the BP oil spill disaster had on a handful of residents along the Gulf Coast, particularly in Dauphin Island, Ala.

The endeavor, which they dubbed the Gulf Ecological and Human Disaster Project, was a chance to see first-hand what was being reported on many media outlets. What the team members found during their June trip changed their perceptions.

In addition to interviews with Gulf Coast residents, the film includes insights from members of the Earth Scan Laboratory at Louisiana State University. It also includes footage from a flight provided by the Alabama Civil Air Patrol, giving the team an aerial look at the impact of the oil spill around Mobile Bay.

The team returned to the Gulf Coast in February to get a look at the progress made in the months after the oil spill.

In addition to creating the documentary, the team has gathered footage for faculty members to use in their courses and spoken to local schools and community groups about their findings.

The film was produced by Tempestas et Caelum Productions, which geographer and climatologist Craig created to provide opportunities for EIU students to explore environmental issues.

Students participating in the film's production were Zach Nugent of Sheridan, a regional Emmy-winning reporter for WEIU-TV's "News Watch"; Michael Gismondi of Buffalo Grove, a WEIU-TV weather forecaster; A.J. Schubert of Charleston, then a graduate assistant in EIU's Center for Academic Technology Support; Bobson Mercier of Haiti, a graduate assistant in CATS; and John DeMatteo of Orland Park, from the EIU WeatherCenter.

For more information on the documentary, including a preview of the film and segments of WEIU-TV news reports that used footage from the trips, see www.tcpfims.com.