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Windows on the world at Norfolk Avenue Starbucks

Documentary puts baristas and customers in spotlight

by Bradford Pearson/Staff Writer

Charlotte Guidi, sipping a vanilla steamer, gabbed with her mother about an upcoming sleepover, the 4-year-old's first.

Smiling politely to her daughter, Christina Guidi occasionally reached across the table to fix Charlotte's dangling pigtails. The scene was much like any afternoon for the mother and daughter, until the camera crew appeared.

Charlotte and Christina Guidi were taking part in the shooting of "Glocalization Tales," a documentary film shot in Bethesda by filmmaker Andrei Kirilenko.

The documentary, shot in the Norfolk Avenue Starbucks, documents the lives of

four baristas and four regular customers to show the "human face of globalization."

Kirilenko hopes viewers will recognize the differences between all the people in the film, despite the fact that they all meet at the same neighborhood coffee shop.

The eight people in the film are interviewed by Kirilenko and his producer, Kiley Kraskouskas, but are generally just asked to speak about their lives.

"Starbucks is the lens through which the story is told," said Timothy Phillips, director of photography for the film. "The common thread through the stories is that they are all here at Starbucks."

Glocalization is a theory popularized by sociologist Roland Robertson, and it represents the combining of global entities with local communities. Starbucks, Kirilenko said, is a prime example of that.

"The global Starbucks meets the local neighborhood of Bethesda," he said. "This coffee shop represents not only Bethesda, but also the D.C. area, the United States and the world." Kirilenko, 39, moved to the United States from Ukraine 17 years ago. Bethesda, to him, was the perfect locale for a film about glocalization.

"Bethesda is very interesting," Kirilenko said. "You have a Starbucks next to the Taste Diner, which is such a blend of styles, just like the people. And diverse as it is, it is still very wealthy."



Charles E. Shoemaker/The Gazette

Director Andrei Kirilenko discusses a shot with Tim Phillips, cameraman and director of photography for Kirilenko's film "Glocalization Tales." The film was shot at a downtown Bethesda Starbucks and will discuss the role that four baristas and four customers play in globalization.

While Kirilenko has directed a slew of short films, “Glocalization Tales” will be just his second feature-length documentary. His first, “Technostorks,” was about in-vitro fertilization and fertility, and earned him the Best Health Documentary award at the 2006 New York Independent Film and Video Festival.

“Glocalization Tales” was shot over 10 days in Bethesda, and included interviews from all walks of life. One homeless man led Kirilenko and his crew through a day in his life, starting at 4:30 a.m. at the Bethesda Metro station and culminating with his daily stop at Starbucks, where, despite his tight budget, he enjoys the hot chocolate and doughnuts.

Another woman spoke about how her life changed after the tsunami struck southeast Asia in December 2004. Cindy Crane traveled to Thailand to help with the disaster relief, and upon her return decided to go back to graduate school for social work. Despite having no film experience, she said that she is enjoying the process, and the film’s message.

“I appreciate the global aspect of Starbucks, especially their focus on a greater mission,” Crane said. “I’m just a regular Bethesda mom and this is really interesting and exciting.” To prepare for the film, Kirilenko had to approach the corporate offices of Starbucks, who, according to him, are notorious for not allowing filming in their locations. After getting permission to shoot, he started speaking with the baristas at the shop to get a sense of their lives at Starbucks.

“We approached the baristas and asked them who their favorite customers were,” Kirilenko said. “They steered us towards the four customers we used.”

While Starbucks would not allow press to speak with their baristas, one expressed his opinion about his job.

“I love the diversity at Starbucks,” he said. “Everyone is from different backgrounds.”

Before the film was shot, Kirilenko and Kraskouskas anticipated a difficult endeavor, especially during the morning coffee rush. But during each shoot nothing changed: Drinks are still made at the same pace and customers still filter in and out, unencumbered by the boom microphones and cameras.

“The first day we had all kinds of production assistants, but we didn’t need them,”

Kraskouskas said. “Even at 7 or 8 a.m. people just move around the cameras.”

While by no means a Hollywood studio, Bethesda has seen its share of filmmaking.

According to David Dabney, executive director for Bethesda Urban Partnership, a nonprofit that promotes downtown Bethesda, Bethesda’s streetscapes are used about once a year for film shootings.

In the early 1990s, he added, a scene for the film “The Pelican Brief,” starring Julia Roberts and Denzel Washington, was filmed at a now-razed parking garage.

As for the goals of the film, Kirilenko hopes that people will be affected at different levels.

“At an intellectual level, I’d like to show people that glocalization begins with them, and while it is a concept, it is really about how open-minded you are,” he said. “At a cinematic level, I want to show people a modern slice of America. I hope that people will recognize the person on the other side of the counter as alive, and having a story to tell.”

Kraskouskas said that after the film wrapped, it would take up to a year to edit it. She hopes to present “Glocalization Tales” to film festivals starting next summer.