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Dean’s Column

BY GUEST COLUMNIST MATTHEW WRIGHT

BOYD’S SECOND ANNUAL PUBLIC INTEREST FILM FESTIVAL

On September 13 and 14, 2012, Boyd Law School hosts its second annual Public Interest Film Festival, highlighting three documentary films that explore the legitimacy of the justice system and the fairness of the penalties it imposes. As the film festival brings together film and policymakers, judges, faculty members, students and members of the public, it also celebrates the award-winning documentary films included in the Wiener-Rogers Law Library’s collection.

The film festival kicks off Thursday evening, September 13, with a showing of “Crime After Crime,” hosted by the filmmaker Yoav Potash; his film is about a battered woman convicted of her abuser’s murder, and the two pro bono attorneys who appealed her conviction and sentence. The film examines questions of culpability, prosecutorial misconduct and disproportionate sentencing.

Friday’s program begins with an introduction by Barbara Buckley, the former speaker of the Nevada Assembly and the current executive director of the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada. Buckley returns to the festival this year to open Friday’s programs with a discussion, facilitated by Potash, on the use of popular media in the representation of traditionally under-served clients.

Friday’s lunch panel brings together a distinguished group of academics, policymakers and involved community members to examine, from different perspectives, the collateral (or civil) consequences arising from criminal convictions. Moderated by Boyd’s own Professor Ann Cammett, the panel includes Professor Jack Chin from the University of California-Davis School of Law, Nevada State Assemblyman Richard Segerblom and Deacon Bonnie Polley of Christ Church Episcopal, Las Vegas, who also serves as chaplain of the Clark County Detention Center. These panelists will address the use of model legislation to mitigate the effects of collateral consequences, as well as the real-life challenges faced by former inmates upon re-entry.

The two films shown on Friday, “Hot Coffee” and “Abused: The Postville Raid,” explore questions of legitimacy, process and penalty from the perspectives of tort reform and immigration. “Hot Coffee,” shown at the Sundance Film Festival in 2011, looks at tort reform through various lenses: the infamous McDonald’s hot-coffee litigation; the election of a state Supreme Court judge in Mississippi; the capping of a medical malpractice award; and the enforcement of mandatory arbitration clauses. In each case, the filmmaker argues that the legitimacy of the process and the fairness of the outcome are subverted by outside interests. The subject of “Abused: The Postville Raid,” is a 2008 raid by federal immigration officials on a Postville, Iowa, meat-processing plant that resulted in hundreds of undocumented workers being processed through a hastily conceived and implemented judicial system.

The festival concludes Friday evening with a keynote address by Nevada Supreme Court Justice Michael Douglas, followed by a reception in the Wiener-Rogers Law Library. The library’s film collection includes more than 2,000 documentary films focusing on civil and human rights, the rule of law and social justice issues. The films in the library’s collection are used in the classroom to bring home to students their responsibilities as lawyers and to challenge accepted notions about our legal system.

The film festival is open to the public. It is sponsored by the Boyd School of Law and is supported by a variety of local organizations, including the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association, the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and the Access to Justice Commission. Boyd is grateful to these sponsors for their generosity.

More information about the festival, including a festival program and complete listing of speakers and sponsors, is available on the festival website at http://law.unlv.edu/PublicInterestFilmFestival2012.

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