

Festival aims to inspire dialogue on Jewish life



The ninth annual Rutgers New Jersey Jewish Film Festival features a provocative mix of documentaries and features from across the globe, including "The Galilee Eskimos," which follows a group of senior citizens who are abandoned and betrayed by society and their relatives.

In a fall [movie](#) season defined by Chihuahuas straight outta Beverly Hills, gross-out comedies that would make the Farrelly brothers blush and a little sleeper called "High School Musical 3: Senior Year," the ninth annual Rutgers New Jersey Jewish Film Festival is, how shall we put it?

Refreshing.

The 11-day festival, kicking off on Sunday, Nov. 9, at Regal Cinema Commerce Center in North Brunswick, has earned a reputation for presenting a provocative mix of documentaries and features from across the globe.

"We really want there to be a story here that people can either learn from or relate to or raise questions about and talk about," says Karen Small, director of the festival and associate director of the festival's presenting organization, Rutgers University's Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life. "And (we want) films that will touch people . . . that speak to our audience in a certain way and inform us on something about Jewish life or Jewish issues .that maybe we didn't think about before."

"Praying With Lior," a documentary about a young man with Down Syndrome preparing for his bar mitzvah, fits the bill, as does "Two Ladies," a French film about an unlikely friendship between a Jewish woman and a Muslim woman.

"I think ("Two Ladies") helps the audience to look at people, relationships, culture in a new way and hopefully start a dialogue here, too," Small says. " . . . We want to bring people together, but in an educational setting. We want to help break down stereotypes and help people understand each other better, if it's people from different religions, if it's people within the same religion."

This year, in a nod to the state of Israel's 60th anniversary, the festival bill highlights six Israeli films, including "Jellyfish," the 2007 Cannes Film festival [Camera](#) d'Or winner. A complete festival schedule is available online at the Web site listed in the information box.

And as always, festival organizers have scheduled events to complement film screenings. On Sunday, Nov. 16, the festival will sponsor a panel discussion on Israeli cinema. That evening, Russian-immigrant boxer and strictly observant Jew Dmitriy Salita, the subject of a documentary called "Orthodox Stance," will appear at a screening of the film. Scholars, filmmakers and others are scheduled to appear throughout the festival, as well.

Thirteen films are on this year's bill; most will screen twice. Four films are making their New Jersey premieres.

"There are so many different [windows](#) into these worlds," Small says. "Film is a wonderful vehicle to take us there."

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