

HANDOUT 30

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STARZ TV SPOT SPEAKS OUT AGAINST ETHNIC STEREOTYPING

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WASHINGTON - Expertise with Moroccan food and auspicious timing gave Denver-area restaurant owner Mohammed Ettachsini the chance to help fellow Arab-Americans.

Ettachsini runs Sahara's restaurant, a favorite of employees at nearby Starz Encore Group, the nation's largest cable movie packager. When Starz, based in the Denver Tech Center, decided to make a public-service announcement on the dangers of ethnic stereotyping in the wake of Sept. 11, they turned to Ettachsini. Ettachsini and five other Denver residents are featured in a 30-second television spot that begins airing nationwide this week. The public-service announcements show Ettachsini and the others in their everyday lives, with a message about the dangers of discriminating against Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans.

The spots will be seen in millions of households nationwide, through agreements Starz made with six other major cable operators. The Starz public-service announcement is one of two that will be aired. The second was made by Cleveland advertising agency Brokaw Inc.

'A lot of people, they generalize (that) every Muslim is bad, with a beard and dark hair,' Ettachsini said. 'I hope that everybody will understand there are some fanatics and extremists in every religion and every kind of people.'

Attacks against Arab-Americans increased sharply after Sept. 11 but have since dropped back to pre-Sept. 11 levels, said James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute. Zogby said it is messages such as the ones in the public-service announcements that are helping reduce the racially motivated crimes.

But there are still enough incidents that some Arab-Americans feel fearful, said Ibrahim Kazerooni, a religious minister at Denver's Islamic Center of Ahl-Al-Beit. Kazerooni also appears in the Starz public-service announcement.

After Sept. 11, he said, people were threatened on the street and children were sent home from school because of fears they might be injured, he said.

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'It became so widespread, it became difficult for people to try to say it was an isolated (incident),' Kazerooni said.

Starz made the public-service announcements because chairman and chief executive officer John Sie, who immigrated from China, wanted to use his company to help ease racial tensions after the attacks.

Sie said he was upset by the killing of a Sikh storeowner in Arizona and other attacks against Arabs.

'I am an American who has experienced the hurt of ethnic stereotyping,' Sie said. 'This issue is very close and dear to my heart. ... I also believe those of us who are in the media have a strong responsibility to promote our core values.'

Sie launched the campaign Thursday in Washington, where he was joined by Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham. Mineta, of Japanese heritage, and Abraham, who is an Arab-American, both emphasized the importance of avoiding stereotyping.

'I know firsthand about being judged by one's looks and by one's skin color,' Mineta said.

The ads will also run on screens at the Pepsi Center, during breaks in Nuggets and Avalanche games.