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Minutemen, crossers picture the border

By Brady McCombs

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The idea that a few hundred disposable cameras distributed to illegal entrants and Minuteman volunteers would add a human element to the polarizing immigration debate seemed far-fetched when a trio of college graduates headed to the border in the summer of 2005.

More than a year later, University of Arizona alum Rudy Adler and his colleagues, Brett Huneycutt and Victoria Criado, are starting to see results from the Border Film Project, a photo exhibit of images taken with the cameras by anonymous illegal entrants and Minuteman Civil Defense Corps volunteers.

Putting a face to the opposing sides of the immigration debate was the point of the the Border Film Project, said Adler who now lives in New York and works for a startup publication, GoodMagazine.com. "There is something nice about getting people to see both sides of this issue."

The project almost didn't get off the ground for the Adler, of Phoenix, Honeycutt, a Phoenix native and Boston College graduate, and Criado, a native of Puerto Rico and graduate of Boston College. They gave out 100 disposable cameras to would-be illegal entrants in Nuevo Laredo with a card inside an envelope asking for their name and address and promising a \$25 check in return for the camera.

They didn't get a single one back, Adler said.

They fine-tuned the operation by putting Wal-Mart gift cards inside the envelopes and presenting their idea at migrant shelters in Mexico. They told the would-be illegal entrants that they didn't need to give their name and that they would put \$25 on the gift card upon receiving the camera.

They received about 30 cameras from the 600 they distributed. They offered Minuteman Civil Defense Corps volunteers a \$10 gas card and received 35 from them. In total, they had about 2,000 photos to choose from.

About 275 color photos adorn the white walls of the exhibit. A few of the photos are large but most of them are 4-by-6 prints. This helped keep the costs manageable and maintain the simplicity of an exhibit that started with disposable cameras, said Marilu Knode, senior curator at the museum.

Migrant and Minuteman photos are mixed on the wall to show the similarities and differences between the two groups. A 15-minute video featuring interviews with illegal entrants and Minuteman volunteers is also part of the exhibit.

The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art decided to show the exhibit because it presented the immigration issue in a new light, Knode said.

"Giving the cameras to the actual people involved gives us a personal face to a very, very complicated situation," she said.

Those images — which range from blistered migrant feet to people standing in the desert to Minuteman

If you go

When: Open now until Jan. 28

Where: Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, 7374 E. Second St. in Scottsdale.

What: Using photos taken with disposable cameras by Minuteman Civil Defense Corps volunteers and illegal entrants, the exhibit examines the volatile issue of immigration from two distinct perspectives.

Cost: Admission is \$7 for adults and \$5 for students. Free on Thursdays to all.

Museum hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday; Noon-5 p.m. Sunday; closed on Monday.

On the Web: The Border Film Project (www.borderfilmproject.com)

volunteers on patrol — make it an important exhibit that represents both sides of the issue, said Joe Martin, 66, of Phoenix, who came to see the exhibit Wednesday.

"They have images of what's going on, you can see it," he said. "I would say it's fair."

Adler, Huneycutt and Criado, all 25 years old, haven't yet recouped all of the \$30,000 the project cost but have earned credibility and respect for their unique project, Adler said.

The exhibit has shown in cities across the country including Los Angeles, New York, Omaha and Houston. They were invited to speak at a conference on human rights in Mexico City this summer and received offers to show the exhibit in Mexico. They just finished a book with the photos, he said.

"We wanted to do something innovative, to tell the story of what was happening in a new way," said Adler, who graduated in 2003 from the University of Arizona with a degree in finance and entrepreneurship. "I think our project adds a human element that can get lost in the media."

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