



PRESS-REGISTER

Area man is part of TV cultural swap

Tuesday, December 25, 2007

By MIKE BRANTLEY
TV & Media Editor

Native Mobilian Mike Blase saw over the horizon and into the hearts of the people of another culture this past summer.

Described by a Hallmark Channel spokesman as "a cowboy from Mobile," Blase met and befriended Mahmoud Hassan, an Egyptian horse trainer, during the production of a documentary that will be televised this weekend on the Hallmark Channel.

For the program, Blase, who resides with his family just over the state line in Lucedale, Miss., spent nearly two weeks this past June with Hassan and his family in Giza, Egypt. In August, Hassan came to America to spend time with Blase and his family.

It was a learning experience for each of the men and their families, and cameras captured the cultural exchange for the program called "The Bridge." It will air at 10 a.m. Sunday on Hallmark.

Months after his return home, Blase referred to the people of Egypt as "a remarkable people."

"For a country boy like me, the biggest thing I learned is how poorly educated we are in foreign cultures," the American said. "It was really eye-opening. ... In America, we are able to get ahead if we want just by striving and working hard. Over there, they work hard just to survive each day. Some of the poorest people over there are some of the most honorable people."

The one-hour documentary tells the story not just of Blase, but of other Arabs and Westerners encountering one another for the first time. Also featured will be an Atlanta radio therapist who meets a television talk show host from Cairo.

Viewers will see how each of the participants traveled to a foreign country to meet, live and work with their counterparts.

"The Bridge" is presented by Faith & Values Media, a coalition of Christian, Jewish and Islamic faith groups dedicated to media production, distribution and promotion. The program is a joint international production of Common Ground Productions, Video Cairo Sat and DCTV.

Blase, 34, is an insurance adjuster who has put his love of horses to work as a volunteer member of the Mobile County Sheriff's Office's mounted unit.

He discovered that he and his Egyptian host, Hassan, have much in common.

"He is an outstanding fellow," Blase said. "He works hard. He has a tourist business with horse stables in Giza. People come to him to rent horses, and he escorts them on horseback to the pyramids. You can see the Great Pyramids from his stables."

Blase got to know Hassan and his two wives during his visit to Egypt. Then his own wife and two daughters got to meet the Egyptian when he came to their home in America.

Then it was Hassan's turn to learn more about Americans in their home country.

Blase's wife, Hope, and their children, Michaela, 10, and Bethany, 8, will be shown in those sequences.

"Mahmoud learned that Americans are not all about money," Blase said. "Especially down here in the South, it's all about being as right as you can be and being fair."

Since the two visits, the men and their families have kept in touch via text messages and e-mails.

"He's a great guy," Blase said. "Hopefully, my family can go to Egypt and visit his family."

© 2008 Press-Register

© 2008 al.com All Rights Reserved.