

Italian film company studies Muslim integration in U.S.

By Pat McTaggart

News correspondent

ELKADER — An Italian documentary film company is looking to Elkader — named for 19th-century freedom fighter Emir Abd-el-Kader — for insight into the integration of Muslims into American society.

"The Italians are curious to see how Muslims are integrated in America," said A. "Tony" Botto of the U.S. State Department's Office of Broadcast Support. "With Elkader's Algerian connection, and with one Muslim living in a town of 1,500 in Middle America, Elkader is a shining example of how this works,"

Botto was speaking of Frederique Boudouani, who moved to Elkader in 2006 and opened Shera's Restaurant and Bar with his partner, Brian Bruening. Boudouani was born in Algiers and was studying engineering at

MIT when the World Trade Center was attacked.

"I learned about Elkader because of the horrific events of that day," he said. "All of a sudden, these 20 horrible people hijacked my religion. When the tenets of your religion tell you that you are doomed if you kill civilians, it is hard to make sense of it all."

Boudouani started to research Islam in America and found out that the first mosque in the United States was built in Cedar Rapids. Researching further, he discovered Elkader's Algerian connection. Besides its name, the Clayton County town of about 1,300 is a sister city of Mascara, Algeria.

He and Bruening, whose parents live in New Hampton, decided to visit Elkader on one of their trips to Iowa.

After the first visit, they returned several times, making friends in the community.

"The cultural connection to Algeria was one of the deciding factors in moving here," Boudouani said. "Elkader has pride in that connection, and the friendliness of its people also helped in our decision.

"We thought it was a won-

derful community."

The purpose of the Italian film crew's documentary is to try and show Europeans, especially Italians, the difference between their approach to Muslim immigration and the policies in the United States.



Paola Terzoli
Interpreter

"Italy started bringing in immigrants about 20 years ago," said interpreter Paola Terzoli. "We now have about 4 million immigrants, 2 million of whom are Muslim, in

a country of 56 million."

"There is no real policy about immigrants in Italy, no legislation and no knowledge of how to integrate them into the population," she added. "We need them, but we need to learn how to integrate them into our society."

Journalist Karina Moual, part of the film crew that also filmed in New York City and Dearborn Mich., said citizenship works differently in Italy.

"Even if you were born in Italy, but your parents were immigrants, you are not a citizen," said Moual, the daughter of Moroccan parent who emigrated to Italy. "You have to wait until you are 18 to apply for Italian citizenship, and that may or may not be approved."



Karina Moual
Journalist

She said integration is a concept that often means assimilation and not integration in Europe, especially in Italy.

"In America, everyone respects each other and understands their identity. Muslims can still be Muslims, but they can also be Americans."

Boudouani was more than happy to participate in the documentary.

"When I came to America, I had no problem in integrating into the culture," he said. "I started reading American history, and I think the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are two of the greatest documents ever written."



Frederique Boudouani
Elkader