

Italian crew films Muslim documentary in Elkader

City is proud of its ties to Algeria and its Muslim resident

By **PAT MCTAGGART**

For the TH

ELKADER, Iowa — An Italian film crew was in Elkader April 4 to film part of a documentary about the integration of Muslims into American Society.

The crew spent time in New York City and Dearborn, Mich., before coming to Elkader, which is named for the 19th-century Algerian freedom fighter, Emir Abd-el-Kader. Elkader is a sister city with Mascara, Algeria, birthplace of the Emir.

"This is the 78th project that I have worked on," said U.S. State Department official A. "Tony" Botto, who works for the department's Office of Broadcast Support. Botto has been a television producer for more than 30 years.

"Our programs let people see our

country, and they have extreme credibility. The Italians are curious to see how Muslims are integrated in America. 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."

Boudouani started to research Islam in America. He found out that the first



Frederique Boudouani

mosque in the United States was built in Cedar Rapids, and he discovered Elkader's Algerian connection. 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 wonderful 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 America's policies.

"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 im-

migrants in Italy, no legislation and no knowledge of how to integrate them into the population. We need them, but we need to learn how to integrate them into our society."

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

Boudouani was more than happy to participate in the documentary.

"When I came to America, I had no problem 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. If everyone read the preamble to the Declaration and lived those words, we would not have many of the problems we have in the world."