

For Immediate Release
May 1, 2014

***Oil & Water* Documentary to Premiere at Seattle International Film Festival**
Epic David and Goliath story unfolds in Seattle and the Ecuadorian Amazon
Screening June 3 at 7 p.m. and June 4 at 4:15 p.m. at AMC Pacific Place theater

SEATTLE, Wash.—The filmmaking team of Francine Strickwerda and Laurel Spellman Smith are pleased to announce the world premiere of their new feature documentary *Oil & Water* at the Seattle International Film Festival.

“We’re so happy to bring this film to our hometown audience,” said co-director Francine Strickwerda, “For us, this is where the story began. It’s where we met a young Ecuadorian who led us on the trip of a lifetime, and a film eight years in the making.” The film will screen at AMC Pacific Place theater, Seattle on June 3 at 7 p.m. and June 4 at 4:15 p.m. *Oil & Water* will have its national broadcast premiere September 21, 2014 on the (PBS) World Channel.

Oil & Water is the true story of two boys coming of age as they each confront one of the world’s worst toxic disasters. Hugo Lucitante and David Poritz were born on opposite ends of the oil pipeline. Hugo came to Seattle to fight for the survival of his Cofan tribe in the Ecuadorian Amazon, while David went to Ecuador to launch the world’s first company to certify oil as “fair trade.” Together they explore real solutions for a more just future, not just for the Cofan, but for all people around the world born with oil beneath their feet.

When Lucitante was 10 years old, his tribe made a desperate decision. Fearing extinction, the Cofan sent him to be educated in Seattle, Wash., in hopes that he would return to lead them into a better future. A decade later in 2006, the filmmakers followed Lucitante as he graduated from Seattle’s Bishop Blanchet High School, wearing a crown of parrot feathers and a boar’s tooth necklace. The filmmakers followed Lucitante as he returned to Ecuador to meet his destiny, armed only with a high school diploma.

David Poritz was just a sixth-grader when he learned of the oil disaster in Lucitante’s homeland. With the blessing of his mother, Poritz started a humanitarian aid project that led him away from his home in Amherst, Mass. to spend much of his youth in the Amazon. As young teens, Poritz and Lucitante met by chance during a shared canoe ride, and then later, when the pair traveled to tour the damage cause by the 18 billion gallons of oil waste that was dumped on Hugo's ancestral lands. The area's people experience unexplainable rashes, childhood deformities and ballooning cancer rates. *Oil & Water* follows the young men back to the U.S. as their lives and the situation in Ecuador get more complicated.

While still a college student at Brown University, David launched the world's first international company to certify oil as “fair trade,” meaning that it is drilled in a safer and

more ethical way. The film shows David and his seven employees in the early stages of certifying their first customer, Petroamazonas, the state-controlled oil company of Ecuador. David's approach might be whopping game changer for the oil industry. *Oil & Water* explores what could be a revolution as it was being led by a 22-year-old.

The filmmakers also followed Lucitante as he struggled with culture shock, the demands of learning to be a Cofan tribal leader, and becoming a husband. He married Sadie, a Lebanese-American girl and she moved from Seattle to make a home with Hugo in the jungle. Hardship pushed the couple back to the U.S. where Lucitante was forced to shoulder two minimum wage jobs. Through it all, the tribe looks to Lucitante for help fending off oil prospectors pushing deeper into the rainforest. A significant oil deposit lies under Hugo's village, and it's only a matter of time before their world could be lost forever.

Can Hugo become the leader his tribe so urgently wants him to be? Will David clean up one of the world's dirtiest industries? *Oil & Water* is an intimate portrait of two young people finding their voices and trying to beat incredible odds.

The filmmakers say they hope the film will spark discussion about responsible oil production, even as the world should be moving away from burning oil for fuel.

“The fight against climate change demands that we radically reduce our dependence on oil, but that won't happen overnight,” said co-director Laurel Spellman Smith. Besides transportation, heating and power, petroleum is a critical ingredient in all kinds of manufactured products, from solar panels to pacemakers, she added. “Even if we stopped driving our cars tomorrow, our bicycle tires will still be made of petroleum.”

For at least the near future, we're going to be living with oil, Spellman Smith said. “It's our responsibility as consumers to make sure it is produced in a safer way.”

Strickwerda said that as filmmakers, they hope the film can be used to help people born with oil beneath their feet. “From poor communities in the Amazon to the fracking zones of North Dakota, this story affects us all, especially now that the U.S. is becoming the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas,” she said.

Eight years in the making, *Oil & Water* was made for broadcast on PBS and funded by Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), Independent Television Service (ITVS) The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Chicken and Egg Pictures, the Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, Seattle 4Culture, Pacific Pioneer Fund and Puma. Strickwerda and Spellman Smith's earlier film *Busting Out* about American attitudes toward the female breast, premiered at the Seattle International Film Festival in 2004.

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Visit the Web site at www.oilandwaterdocumentary.com

The Filmmakers

Francine Strickwerda is an award-winning director, writer and producer of documentary films and Web sites. She co-directed the feature film *Oil & Water* for PBS and the acclaimed documentary *Busting Out*, about American attitudes toward the female breast, which aired on Showtime. In addition to working on local and national shows at Seattle's KCTS Public Television, she produced and executive edited national PBS Web sites including *Don't Buy It*, *Videogame Revolution*, *Exploring Space*, and was a senior producer at HealthTalk.com. She currently runs Hullabaloo, a Seattle video production company with her husband, and she has created videos for clients including the United Nations, Fortune 500 companies and the Seattle Fire Department. Francine began her career as a reporter for newspapers in Washington and Idaho. She studied journalism at the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University.

Laurel Spellman Smith is a two-time regional Emmy award-winning producer of national and local programs for PBS including *The NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer and the documentary *Faith & Fear: The Children of Krishna*. She became an independent producer in 2003 and in addition to *Oil & Water* she co-directed and produced the women's health documentary *Busting Out* which aired on Showtime and the Iraq War documentary *The Corporal's Diary*, seen on PBS stations, Al Jazeera English and Link TV. She is also a fan of other people's films and is an annual juror for the News and Documentary Emmy Awards. Laurel grew up in Los Angeles and Kauai before making a home in Seattle with her husband and cat. She graduated from The Evergreen State College, where she studied film and cultural anthropology, pursuing her interest in the latter by traveling to over 100 countries.

Directors' Statement

We once heard a documentary filmmaker say that when you choose an idea for a film, you need to date it a while, and make sure you can fall in love with it. Because you will be eating, drinking and sleeping with it for a long time. It made us laugh, because it's so true. But for us, it's also about how a human story can knock the wind out of you with it's brilliance, and then how it will haunt and nag you until you have no choice but to make your film. That's how we got to making *Oil & Water*, which we began filming in 2006.

One morning we found an article in the *Seattle Times* telling the story of a teenager from an Amazonian tribe who was graduating from a local high school. The Cofan tribe of Ecuador, numbering less than 2,000 people, had sent 10-year-old Hugo Lucitante from Ecuador to the U.S. to get a Western education.

We made a few phone calls and by that same evening, we were on our way to the airport with a camera. Hugo's entire family arrived in Seattle to see him march in his graduation

ceremony. He was the first Cofan to graduate from an American high school, and their hopes were riding on him.

We learned that an oil disaster had occurred on Hugo's ancestral land, and the situation was so bad that news reports called it a "rainforest Chernobyl." A few months later, we ran across a story about a young American from Amherst, Massachusetts, who had worked on the legal case against Texaco. A class-action lawsuit dealing with the oil disaster had been filed in Ecuador, and teen-age David Poritz had been there to witness it. David's experience on the case led him to do humanitarian aid work in the jungle, and as a teenager he had ventured places only the most seasoned of travelers would go, often alone.

We saw many parallels in Hugo and David's stories. Here were two boys, each with a mythic backstory, who almost seemed to have traded places in the universe. They were taking on a Goliath of our times. Hugo and David were both deeply affected by what had happened in Ecuador, and we wondered if we could tell the story of the disaster through their experience. We like to say that we are from the "Mary Poppins School" of filmmaking and that a little sugar helps the medicine go down. Here was the perfect chance to tell a character-driven environmental story that was hopeful and inspirational.

We started filming David at his high school graduation. David was planning to lead a group of students on a "toxic tour" in Ecuador the following month, and we decided to ask if Hugo could come along. Both boys were eager to make the trip together, and it turned out they had already met. Hugo remembered his surprise at finding a young American traveling solo in the jungle, and had given him a ride in his canoe. Shortly before we left for Ecuador, our director of photography let us know he wouldn't be able to make the trip. As filmmakers, we were a team of two producer/directors with years of experience in the field, but little technical knowledge. That was about to change. With our plane tickets in hand and our bags packed, we didn't have time to find a new photographer, so we put ourselves through a quick camera, lighting and sound boot camp and we headed for Ecuador.

Looking back, we had no idea that Hugo and David would become such fascinating young men. We didn't realize just how close the oil companies were to making another assault on Cofan land. And we certainly didn't imagine that we'd be telling the story of a startling effort to revolutionize the oil industry.

We are hopeful that the Cofan will be able to save their culture and their land, and we are in awe of their strength and perseverance. It's been an honor to spend the past eight years following Hugo and David, and we are grateful to them for sharing their stories.