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For downloadable images, visit [itvs.org/pressroom/](http://itvs.org/pressroom/)

For the program companion website, visit [pbs.org/independentlens/creekrunsred](http://pbs.org/independentlens/creekrunsred)

**“THE CREEK RUNS RED”  
TO AIR ON THE PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS***

***Superfund Site Residents Forced to Choose Between the American Dream and Their Health***

(San Francisco, CA)— The EPA calls the mining town of Picher, Oklahoma the most toxic place in America, but a dwindling population still call it home. Today the town is divided by fears of serious health risks, environmental politics, civic pride and old racial tensions between Indian and white society. Exploring the complex and often surprising connection between people and place, **THE CREEK RUNS RED** will have its television premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard on Tuesday, November 20 at 10:00 PM (check local listings).

Located in the far northeast corner of Oklahoma, the town of Picher emerged from the rolling prairie of the Quapaw Indian tribal lands and became the hub of the richest lead and zinc-mining field on the planet. The town thrived and provided bullets for two world wars before beginning a slow decline. Since the area was declared a Superfund site in 1981, Picher’s residents have been forced to choose between preserving their image of the American dream and preserving their health. **THE CREEK RUNS RED** carries us into the heart of a sharply divided community to reveal, with extraordinary intimacy and insight, an array of human reactions to an environmental disaster.

After decades of mining, towering gray hills (or "chat piles") of mine waste covered 25-thousand acres, devastating Quapaw tribal lands, as well as local economies. When the mining stopped in the early 1970s, rusty-red acid mine water began to slowly fill the shafts and cavities beneath the surface until finally spilling over. Springs flowed from the ground and through the fields, burning the legs of the cattle. Eventually the water reached Tar Creek, killing the fish and staining it burnt red. For most people of Picher, the chat piles and the environmental hazards have become part of life, while the immediacy of work, Friday night football, and Sunday church takes precedence. The strange landscape and history of the place are a source of pride and nostalgia.

The isolation of this small corner of America has preserved a sense of rural values and community. Perhaps, because of this, some people desperately wish to stay and to revitalize their town, despite the apparent dangers and lack of opportunity. However, others feel that the toxic environment has already taken its toll on their families and that we might be just beginning to understand the long-term impacts. Scientists at The Center for Disease Control still consider lead exposure the number one threat to children's health in the U.S. **THE CREEK RUNS RED** is an emotionally stirring and intimate portrait of a small town struggling to determine its future in light of its past.

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**THE CREEK RUNS RED**'s companion website ([pbs.org/independentlens/creekrunsred](http://pbs.org/independentlens/creekrunsred)) features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film and more.

### **About the Filmmakers**

San Francisco-based filmmaker **Bradley Beesley (Producer)** has been named one of *Filmmaker Magazine's* "Top 25 Independent Filmmakers" of the year. His critically acclaimed 2005 documentary *The Fearless Freaks* featuring the Flaming Lips, has screened worldwide and aired on The Sundance Channel. *Summertime!*, a new documentary that Bradley co-directed with Sarah Price, premiered at 2006 Toronto International Film Festival and will have theatrical distribution in 2007. Earlier this year, Bradley directed *Roller Girls*, an episodic documentary for A&E. In 2001 he completed his award-winning documentary *Okie Noodling*, which captures the art of barehanded fishing in Oklahoma and continues to have encore PBS broadcasts. His long-term collaboration with the Flaming Lips includes co-directing ten of their music videos and acting as producer and cinematographer on the sci-fi narrative *Christmas on Mars*. His first film, *Hill Stomp Hollar* features R.L. Burnside and won first runner-up at the 1999 SXSW film festival.

**Julianna Brannum (Producer)** has just wrapped production on an episode in a five-part series for PBS's AMERICAN EXPERIENCE on Native American history and was recently granted the Sundance Institute/Ford Foundation Film Fellowship to develop a documentary on American Indian activist, LaDonna Harris. Other projects include a Discovery Channel documentary series, "Play's Anatomy: The History of Video Games" and LTN's "Red Light," a documentary-style weekly lifestyle program on Los Angeles subcultures. In addition to working as a producer, Julianna also spent eight years working as a film programmer for AFI FEST, the Los Angeles Film Festival and Film Independent (formerly IFP/Los Angeles). Julianna Brannum is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma, where she studied Journalism/Radio/TV/Film Production and is a member of the Comanche Tribe of Oklahoma.

**James Payne (Director)** is a documentary film producer and first time director. He began his career working on the feature doc *Hill Stomp Hollar*, which delved into the peculiar intersection of punk rock and Mississippi hill country blues. In 2001 Payne wrote and produced the award winning *Okie Noodling*. **THE CREEK RUNS RED** marks his directorial debut. In 2006, Payne started the company FieldGuide, focusing on documentary, commercial and television production services. Recently, Payne produced *U.F.O.s at the Zoo*, a live music documentary of the Flaming Lips released in 2007. Also in 2007, Payne again partnered with Bradley Beesley as Producer and Co-Filmmaker in *Behind the Walls Rodeo*, a feature documentary about the lives of inmates participating in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary Prison Rodeo. Payne is currently producing: *Finding the Winnebago Guy*, a quirky story of a filmmaker's obsession and search for the true identity of an internet celebrity, due out in 2008.

### **About Independent Lens**

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10:00 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Further information about the series is available at [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). The series producer is Lois Vossen.