

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

Voleine Amilcar, ITVS
Mary Lugo
Cara White

415-356-8383 x 244
770-623-8190
843-881-1480

voleine_amilcar@itvs.org
lugo@negia.net
cara.white@mac.com

For downloadable images, visit itvs.org/pressroom/photos/
For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/stemcell/

**MAPPING STEM CELL RESEARCH: Terra Incognita TO HAVE ITS BROADCAST PREMIERE ON
THE EMMY® AWARD-WINNING PBS SERIES
INDEPENDENT LENS ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2008**

**From Kartemquin Films (*Hoop Dreams*, *THE NEW AMERICANS*), New Documentary
Puts a Human Face on the Stem Cell Controversy**

(San Francisco, CA)—It is one of the most controversial issues of our time, one that is sure to be a major part of the upcoming political debates. **MAPPING STEM CELL RESEACH: Terra Incognita** goes beyond the rhetoric to put a human face on the issue, introducing viewers to doctors, researchers and patients on the front lines. Directed by Maria Finitzo and produced by the award-winning Kartemquin Films (*Hoop Dreams*, *Independent Lens*' *THE NEW AMERICANS*), **MAPPING STEM CELL RESEACH: Terra Incognita** will air nationally on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, January 15, 2008 at 10:00 PM (check local listings).

MAPPING STEM CELL RESEACH: Terra Incognita tells the story of Dr. Jack Kessler, the current chair of Northwestern University's Department of Neurology and Clinical Neurological Sciences, and his daughter, Allison, an undergraduate student at Harvard University. When Kessler was invited to head up the Neurology Department at Northwestern, his focus was on using stem cells to treat the neurological complications of diabetes. However, soon after his move to Chicago, Allison, then age 15, was injured in a skiing accident and paralyzed from the waist down. In the moments following the accident, Dr. Kessler made the decision to change the focus of his research to begin looking for a cure for spinal cord injuries using embryonic stem cells. The film follows his alternately frustrating and exhilarating research, as well as two young women whose lives were devastatingly altered by spinal cord injuries. Following the lives of the Kesslers, lab researchers and others affected by spinal cord injury, the film movingly depicts the high stakes involved in the quest to harness the full potential of stem cell medicine and the resilience and courage of people living every day with devastating disease and injury.

-More-

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the **MAPPING STEM CELL RESEACH: Terra Incognita** (pbs.org/independentlens/stemcell/) companion website which 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.

MAPPING STEM CELL RESEACH: Terra Incognita will be showcased in *Independent Lens*'s national Community Cinema program, the monthly screening series which brings together local public television stations and leading community organizations to hold monthly screenings in more than 45 markets across the country, connecting communities with organizations, information and the opportunity to get involved around the topics presented in the films. More than 400 events are planned for the coming season nationwide. For more, visit: pbs.org/independentlens/getinvolved/cinema/.

About the Filmmakers

Maria Finitzo has been an award-winning filmmaker for 25 years and an Associate of Kartemquin Films for ten years. She has directed and produced projects for network television, public broadcasting and cable. Her work as a filmmaker has taken her from the Galapagos Islands to Russia and has involved subjects ranging from the command and control of nuclear weapons to the psychology of adolescent girls. Her most well known film, *5 GIRLS*, is a feature length documentary film that delves into the hearts and minds of five remarkable young women. The film was a special presentation of the PBS series *P.O.V.* and premiered on national public television in the fall of 2001. In 2002, she directed *No Direction Home*, a short film produced in conjunction with Public Policy Productions, about young people aging out of foster care. Maria has been a producer and writer for the PBS science series *The New Explorers*. Under the banner of her own production company, she has produced and directed a variety of educational and broadcast programs including *Whales*, an episode of the National Audubon Society's *Audubon's Animal Adventures*, a children's nature series for the Disney Channel. The series was awarded the Ace Cable Award for Best Children's Series. Maria also directed and produced a two-part special, *On the Brink... Doomsday*, for The Learning Channel and Towers Productions. She is currently pursuing her MFA at Northwestern University and developing her next project, on religious diversity, with Kartemquin.

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. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

###