



Champions of the Golden Valley

Wednesday, Oct. 14th @6PM

\$15 Tickets | \$12 Members | Studio 210 FREE

For Immediate Release

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Hometown Filmmaker Returns to Pueblo with an Emmy-Winning Documentary

Champions of the Golden Valley -- the Olympics documentary about an unlikely Afghan ski team -- screens October 14th. PUEBLO, Colo. -- One of the most celebrated independent documentaries of the year is coming home to Pueblo. On Wednesday, October 14, the Sangre de Cristo Arts & Conference Center will screen *Champions of the Golden Valley*, the Emmy Award-winning film produced by Pueblo native Katie Stjernholm -- with Stjernholm and director Ben Sturgulewski in attendance for a Q&A afterward.

Hailed by *Variety* as “the ultimate underdog story,” *Champions of the Golden Valley* tells the true, uplifting story of a grassroots ski movement in the mountains of Afghanistan. At its heart is Alishah Farhang, a young skier who came within reach of becoming his country’s first Winter Olympian. After that dream fell short, he returned to his remote homeland of Bamyan and began coaching the next generation. With handmade wooden skis and secondhand gear, boys and girls from rival villages come together to race down the mountains in a competition like no other. When their world is suddenly upended, the lessons they learned on the slopes carry them forward. With the spirit of an underdog sports story, the film is a stunning and unique perspective on the Olympic dream -- showing how competition can strengthen communities, unite cultures, and bring light to even the most unexpected corners of the world.

This year, *Champions of the Golden Valley* earned the 2026 National Emmy Award for Outstanding Sports Documentary. This was the latest honor for a film that premiered at the Tribeca Festival in New York and has since screened at more than 100 film festivals in over 18 countries, winning 52 Jury and Audience Awards, including 26 Grand Prizes. It is executive produced by Nobel Peace Prize laureate and human rights activist Malala Yousafzai and acclaimed actor Arian Moayed (*Succession*, *Wonder Man*, *Nobody Wants This*). Earlier this year, the film was acquired and distributed by the International Olympic Committee in advance of the 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Milano-Cortina.

Colorado audiences already know the film well. It won the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the Denver Film Festival and Best Adventure Film at the Boulder International Film Festival. It was an Official Selection of the coveted Aspen Film Festival and swept both Best Documentary and the Audience Choice Award at the Crested Butte Film Festival, where it was the Opening Night Film. The October 14 event marks the film's Pueblo debut -- and a homecoming for the producer who helped bring it to the screen.

MISSION STATEMENT:

To create artistic, cultural, and educational experiences for everyone



The Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center is proud to be a fully accredited member of the American Alliance of Museums.



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210 N. SANTA FE AVE, PUEBLO, CO 81003 | 719.295.7200 | SDC-ARTS.ORG



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Hometown Filmmaker Returns to Pueblo with an Emmy-Winning Documentary Continued

Stjernholm, who was born and raised in Pueblo, is a graduate of Centennial High School and now lives in a mountain town called Gold Hill outside of Boulder. She spent more than five years making the film with a small independent team, including her partner Ben Sturgulewski, who shot, edited and directed the film. He has Colorado roots himself as a graduate of Colorado College. His alma mater recently awarded him an honorary doctorate for directing Champions. The evening is a rare chance for local students, artists, and aspiring filmmakers to hear firsthand how this duo told a story that traveled the world.

“Making this film has been a labor of love, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to return to my hometown and share it with the Pueblo community,” says producer Katie Stjernholm. “At its heart, this is an underdog story about joy and resilience, and I hope audiences will leave feeling inspired and connected to a community of athletes on the other side of the world.”

PRAISE FOR THE FILM

“Fosters a sparkling feeling of hope.” — Banff Mountain Film Festival (Grand Prize & Audience Award winner)

“A moving and timely story about what joy and unity look like when everything else is falling apart. I’m proud to support this film and the young people whose courage and spirit it so beautifully captures.” — Malala Yousafzai, Executive Producer

EVENT DETAILS

Champions of the Golden Valley -- Film Screening & Filmmaker Q&A

Wednesday, October 14, 2026 | 6:00 PM (doors open 5:30 PM)

Q&A following the screening; reception to follow in the lobby

Sangre de Cristo Arts & Conference Center, 210 N. Santa Fe Ave., Pueblo, CO 81003

Tickets: \$15 | \$12 Members | Studio 210 Free

*Member pricing will reflect in your cart once logged in.

Tickets and info: my.sdcc-arts.org/3736/3742

Run time: 81 minutes. In Dari and English.



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