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UPDATED: Disney-ABC TV unveil plans for huge SCV production expansion

Would create nearly 2,900 full- and part-time jobs

The Walt Disney Co. on Wednesday proposed a 56-acre production studio - including a dozen soundstages - on property it has long owned in the Santa Clarita Valley, predicting \$533 million economic boost to the region.

The Disney | ABC Studios at the Ranch, planned for the western edge of Disney's Golden Oak Ranch, would create about 2,854 full- and part-time jobs, with about 1,000 of them on-site, Disney-ABC officials said.

The company filed paperwork seeking approval from Los Angeles County on Wednesday. Disney-ABC officials said it is too early to project a completion date for the project.

The move would effectively double the total square footage of soundstages the production company owns in Los Angeles County.

Industry advocates and local officials greeted the news as a sign television film crews - which has been fleeing California for more inexpensive locales - may finally be returning as the state has begun offering incentives.

"It's the harbinger we might see more TV production come back to California," said Paul Audley, president of FilmLA. "I can't imagine them not crunching numbers, including the fact that California has now, for the first time, gotten into direct competition with the other 40 states offering incentives."

Meanwhile, Santa Clarita officials said the ranch studio would draw more show-business professionals to the area and provide more customers for nearby Old Town Newhall.

"That will have the single biggest impact on the Santa Clarita economy than anything I have seen since I've been here," said Jason Crawford, the city's economic development manager, who oversees the city's film office.

Despite widespread support, the project remains in its beginning stages and faces several hurdles. The county's approval process includes public hearings on the matter and requires the applicant to painstakingly detail environmental impacts the development could have - a process that can take years.

Disney's 890-acre Golden Oak ranch sits in unincorporated Los Angeles County, just east of Highway 14. Its southern border is just south of Placerita Canyon Road, and stretches north almost far enough to meet Golden Valley Road.

The vast majority of the land serves as unspoiled backdrop, with ridgelines hiding Santa

Clarita's housing and business developments from cameras' view. All of the movie magic happens on 195-acres of flat valley tucked between the hills.

The proposed studio would be laid out "campus-style" on the valley's western tip near Highway 14. Its buildings, including bungalows and offices for talent and writers, would be LEED certified and plans for the development call for restoring the rocky Placerita Creekbed, said Richard Ballering, executive director of production for ABC Studios.

The soundstages would each cover 18,000 sq. feet and the studio would accommodate filming four to six shows at a time, he said.

In addition, the fact that indoor soundstages would be located near outdoor sets opens up more possibilities, he said.

"It gives shows more creative flexibility because they do not have to circle their wagons and head out onto the streets (to film outdoors)," Ballering said, adding in the proposed production center it would be far more simple.

"You walk out the door, and there it is."

Walt Disney Productions bought Golden Oak Ranch in 1959, filming scenes for "The Mickey Mouse Club" and "Old Yeller" there.

Today, the ranch sees more than 300 days of filming a year and has served as a set for scenes in the second and third installments of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" series, as well as "Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement," "Pearl Harbor" and several other movies and television shows.

"There have been a lot of other film-related businesses that have been considering moving to Santa Clarita, but waiting for the right time," Crawford said. "I think that now that Disney is committed to doing this, we're going to see many post-production, visual effects and other film-related businesses that want to move here as well."

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