

Disney building Santa Clarita prod'n facility

The Ranch primarily will serve needs of ABC Studios

By Nellie Andreeva

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Disney is planning to build a 12-stage production facility at its Golden Oak Ranch in the Santa Clarita Valley to serve primarily the needs of ABC Studios.

Disney and ABC Studios have filed applications with Los Angeles County for Disney/ABC Studios at the Ranch, a high-tech soundstage and production complex to be built in the western tip of the Golden Oak Ranch, off the 14 Freeway.

The facility, which would include six pairs of soundstages as well as offices, production shops and storage, would take up 56 acres of the Golden Oak Ranch's 890 acres.

Disney has only two soundstage facilities, one on the Mouse House lot, which has virtually no usable outdoor space, and one at Prospect Studios.

As a result, ABC Studios' 14 locally produced series are spread over nine lots, and those filmed at Disney Studios frequently have to go out for location shoots.

When the Ranch is built, it could accommodate about four established and as many as six freshman shows, said ABC Studios' executive director production Richard Ballering.

"The synergy of indoor and outdoor production" that would keep series shoots on the lot full-time was the main draw for going with the construction plan for the Golden Oak Ranch, which will continue to have 195 acres of outdoor filming/movie ranch, Ballering said.

The plan came together during the past year.

"The company recognized and got serious about pushing for the project, which would provide opportunities to increase efficiencies and create a more cost-effective production model," Ballering said.

He declined comment on the size of the company's investment in the Ranch. According to figures released by ABC Studios, the project is expected to generate 3,152 new jobs and \$522 million in economic activity during construction and 2,854 full- and part-time jobs and \$533 million in annual economic activity when completed.

The announcement drew praise from California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

"This move will create quality jobs and a great deal of direct economic activity -- all right here in California, the best place in the world to shoot films and television," the actor-turned-politician said Wednesday.

There is no official launch date for the facility, but Disney is looking at a possible 2013 construction start date.

Disney bought the Golden Oak Ranch in 1959 and set it up as an outdoor filming space. Originally used primarily for Westerns, it was expanded to accommodate a wide range of feature, TV and commercial productions.

Films and series shot on the premises include "Old Yeller," "Pearl Harbor," "Independence Day," the two "Pirates of the Caribbean" sequels, "Lassie," "Bonanza," "The X-Files," "CSI" and "Entourage."

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