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## **Disney expands studios**

### **New facilities to be built at Santa Clarita property**

By PETER CARANICAS

In a surprise move, Disney and ABC Studios announced plans Wednesday to build six pairs of soundstages and other production facilities on property it owns in the Santa Clarita Valley north of Los Angeles.

Known as the Golden Oak Ranch, the 890-acre site was leased by Disney in the late 1950s and then bought up beginning in 1959. Mouse House used the land as the outdoor filming location for pics ranging from "Old Yeller" and "The Parent Trap" to two "Pirates of the Caribbean" installments.

Disney's plans for substantial investment in the ranch are a sign of the company's commitment to local production.

Now the company has filed paperwork with Los Angeles County to build on 56 acres of the property adjacent to the 14 Freeway. That would leave 195 acres for lensing, with the rest of the land remaining undeveloped.

The land is about a half-hour via freeway from Disney's Burbank headquarters and lies within the industry-designated 30-mile studio zone.

While the application has just been filed, construction is not expected to start until 2013, per Richard Ballering, exec director of production for ABC Studios.

"We'll go through a lengthy review process," he said, including "an extensive outreach process to hear back from the community on their questions and concerns, and an extensive environmental review process."

Ballering adds that Disney's primary objective for the project is TV work, but that it's being designed to handle "any kind of creative content, including films, commercials and new formats yet to be invented."

"Some might consider this a gutsy move because there's been skepticism about the health of motion picture and TV production," said Jack Kyser, economist with the L.A. County Economic Development Corp.

"With all the talk about runaway production and people leaving town, this is a major stake in the ground," he

added. "Disney is willing to invest a lot of money."

Despite a contraction in some parts of the business, Disney remains optimistic about the future of TV production. "Over last 10 years we've seen a growing need for facilities to produce original content for cable and other outlets," Ballering said. "Plus, the average show now uses more soundstages. A one-hour show that once required two stages to produce can now need four."

Disney's game plan includes making the facilities available to outside companies when possible.

"We're primarily building this for our company's needs," Ballering said, "but, like (our studios in Burbank) they'll be available to the industry as a whole."

The project had been under wraps until Wednesday's announcement. "You've got to hand it to the Disney people; they've done a marvelous job of keeping this quiet," said Larry Mankin, prexy of the Santa Clarita Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Mankin predicted that community reaction to the plan will be generally positive because "lots of people living here work in the film and TV industry. We're really excited to keep business here."

Disney estimated that the project would create 3,152 jobs during construction. Once finished, it would employ 2,854 full- or part-time workers and contribute \$533 million in annual economic activity to L.A. County.

The Disney property is on unincorporated territory, and the building site lies atop landfill created when the adjoining freeway was carved through, which could minimize concerns of environmentalists.

"But with this type of thing you never know," Kyser said. "People can spring up out of nowhere."

Disney has created a brochure that's being mailed out to residents in the area soliciting their support.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger issued a statement congratulating Disney for a move "that will create quality jobs and a great deal of direct economic activity ... here in California."

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