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Film industry lauds city for its friendliness

- Movie leaders, local officials meet

Santa Clarita Valley was a hot movie location back when Tom Mix was shooting at bad guys and a its still hot movie location with CSI, 24 and NCIS agents shooting at bad guys.

The film industry's No. 1 number cruncher came to Santa Clarita Friday to remind Santa Clarita Mayor Bob Kellar and Assemblyman Cameron Smyth just how important this valley is to making movies and making money.

Jack Kyser, senior vice president and chief economist for the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation, told a select audience at a restaurant inside Six Flags that Santa Clarita is one of the most business-friendly towns for movie-makers.

He painted a bleak picture of the California film industry as a whole, but lauded Santa Clarita as the model city for movie-making.

"When I was a young boy I used to see all the Tom Mix movies made here and now when I see CSI I look and see all the same hills in the background," Kyser said, as he flashed several slide charts to illustrate the economic importance of making films.

"The joke is that it's not really CSI Las Vegas but really CSI Santa Clarita."

While the numbers reflected a overall decline in movie revenue since 2004, the numbers pertaining to film and TV production in Santa Clarita were impressive:

- 20 sound stages
- 10 movie ranches
- 7,000 Santa Clarita residents employed in the entertainment industry.
- 30 percent of all crews used by filmmakers

"We hit a peak in 2004 but it's been a slow decline in the job numbers since then," Kyser said, adding the recent writers strike was a significant economic impact on the industry.

"Thank God it lasted only for 100 days," he said. "The upcoming talks with the Screen Actors Guild - that's making a lot of people nervous."

What's hurting the industry in California the most, however, are filming incentives such as tax breaks offered to film producers from out of state or out of the country.

"There are no incentives offered in California but there are plenty of aggressive initiatives offered by other states," he said, citing Albuquerque, N.M. and Shreveport, La.

"These people are very serious about getting this movie business," Kyser said. "We cannot afford to NOT have incentives."

"It's nice to have a business-friendly community like Santa Clarita," he added.

Amy Lemisch, executive director of the California Film Commission, said her department is doing everything it can "to make it as easy as possible to film here.

"Pockets of communities, like Santa Clarita, actually get it ... Santa Clarita Film office is a shining star in my networking group.

"You're keeping residents happy while bringing in business." she said.

Kellar had some impressive numbers of his own: 800 films shot in Santa Clarita Valley, 300 movie permits issued and more than \$20.4 million from location filming alone.

"Looking back to the days when movies featuring Tom Mix and William S. Hart were filmed here, it's good to see Santa Clarita Valley is still a home to a thriving movie industry," he said.

Smyth, whose constituency in California congressional District #38 takes in Chatsworth, said "I do get teased about the filming that goes on in Chatsworth."

While he didn't mention the billions of dollars generated by (Chatsworth's) adult film industry he did not hesitate to point out the economic significance of mainstream filming in Santa Clarita.

"Whoever would have thought that the film industry would be in jeopardy," he said. "But it is.

"We're trying to convince our colleagues in Sacramento to try and bring back that business.

"Other states have begun to cherry pick (film production contracts) with tax breaks.

"They're lured to other states," he said. "The challenge we face in Sacramento is to convince San Francisco and other cities that the film industry benefits us all."