

Filming up in Santa Clarita

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July 19, 2011

Location filming in the city of Santa Clarita had its best year ever in the past 12 months since the city began issuing location filming permits in 2003.

The city's film office issued 341 film permits and recorded 878 film days for the city's fiscal year of July 2010 through June 2011.

Launched in January 2003, the previous record for film days and permits was set in 2007-08, just as the economy began setting its own record lows.

The city's film incentive programs and film office serve as a revenue-generating engine for the local community.

Businesses, hotels and restaurants benefit when large crews descend on the city and spend money locally. The city of Santa Clarita estimates an average of \$20 million is generated each year as a result of local production spending.

Incentive programs

"The city approved the first city-supported film incentive program in the greater L.A. area," said Jason Crawford, Santa Clarita economic development and marketing manager.

The program, introduced in April 2009, allows production companies to save money when hiring crews for productions based in the Santa Clarita Valley.

The film-incentive program also refunds fee permits, under certain conditions, to creative productions that base and film their production in Santa Clarita.

The city refunds up to 50 percent of the Transient Occupancy Taxes collected within the city for production companies that purchase a minimum of five room nights at a local hotel.

Production companies taking advantage of the local incentive program also earn substantial law-enforcement traffic control and safety savings by receiving contract rates for productions. The city's film office says production companies can save \$10 to \$16 per hour compared with rates outside the area or with private entities.

Contracting for services is handled by the city's film office as part of the permitting process, making it an easy, one-stop production setup for companies.

The state's Film and Television Tax Incentive, combined with the city's film program, have helped to attract and retain industry activity in the Santa Clarita Valley.

The state's film incentive program passed in 2009 and took effect Jan. 1. The state program allows a credit against income, sales or use taxes, based on qualified expenditures.

Since the program went into effect, more than 25 approved projects have filmed in the Santa Clarita.

Heart of Hollywood

"When we began issuing film permits in 2003, we had the lowest fee permits," Crawford said.

"In 2009, as part of our 21-Point Business Plan, we began subsidizing costs by offering permit and tax rebates," he said.

The film incentive program was extended in 2010 and again in 2011 due to the success of the program in attracting increased location filming to Santa Clarita.

It was first created as a one-year program, but the City Council has approved extension of the program each subsequent year as it reviews and approves budget items.

The city works on a zero-based budget method, starting over from scratch each year, so that no program or expense becomes permanently set in the budget, Crawford said.

For years, other states and countries have been adding incentives, taking film production away from Los Angeles, Crawford noted.

Some of the areas have been rescinding the programs, saying they can no longer be justified economically when the programs fail to deliver a desired economic activity to an area.

"But there are another 40 states that still have incentive programs," Crawford said. "They're all competing and vying to take film away from us."

Just a short distance away from the "entertainment capital of the world," Santa Clarita offers multiple opportunities for on-location filming, absent the hurdles that often accompany film shoots in congested cities.

We have the best of both worlds up here, Crawford said. You don't feel like you're in L.A. but the area is easily drivable from L.A.

"The city continues to invest in attracting production to Santa Clarita," said Mayor Marsha McLean.