

## Strike Impact on Santa Clarita Not Quantifiable Yet

By Nadra Kareem - 1/21/2008

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Location filming in Santa Clarita reached an all-time high during the 2006-2007 fiscal year, giving city businesses an economic boost upward of \$21 million.

But now that the writers' strike has stretched out for more than two months, it's unlikely that Santa Clarita will break that record. The exact financial toll the strike has had on the city is unknown, however, and so far, the dispute appears to have affected different entities in different ways.

Jessica Freude, film and tourism analyst for the city's Economic Development Office, said that the strike has made a dent. "The writers strike is beginning to impact us," she said. "Our numbers for filming in December were about half what they were the previous year. A lot of our shows have gone dark."

Four shows are filmed on an ongoing basis in Santa Clarita. They include cable television series "The Riches," starring Minnie Driver and Eddie Izzard, and "Big Love," starring Bill Paxton, Chloe Sevigny. The fact that production on the shows has been shut down has put a considerable number of residents out of work, Freude said. "It's not something we wanted to see."

The good news for the city is that it hasn't lost all of its entertainment-related work. Television commercials and the like continue to be filmed in Santa Clarita, according to Freude. "We're absolutely continuing to provide quality and high service for the companies who are still filming here," she said. "We're certainly trying to help them as much as we can here."

A popular location for filming in the area is the Hyatt Valencia and Santa Clarita Conference Center. "We're known in the Valley as being an excellent location because of our landscaping and our grounds. They also use our conference center," said General Manager Chris Aldieri.

Scenes from the smash indie feature "Little Miss Sunshine" were filmed at the Hyatt, as have been episodes of "24" and "Las Vegas." The Hyatt is such a popular location because the hotel makes its back parking lots accessible to production crews, he said. In contrast to several months ago, though, "We have not seen any requests coming in as of late," Aldieri said.

The hotel does not include the money it earns from shoots in its budget. But when filming is done there, the Hyatt can generate anywhere from \$5,000 to \$50,000 a day, so the loss in funds is significant.

Jack Kyser, chief economist for the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, estimates that the writers' strike has had a direct and indirect impact of \$1.37 billion on the economy. "This does not include a lot of small suppliers to the industry like prop houses and specialty sets," Kyser said. "We do know that there are several sound stages in Santa Clarita. Any place you do have sound stages, there's going to be impact."

Rene Veluzat of Santa Clarita-based Blue Cloud Movie Ranch has about 40 different sets he makes available to film production crews. With four new projects booked, Veluzat said that the movie ranch has largely been unaffected by the strike. "I'm in pretty good shape," he said.

That's because the projects he's now working on are independent and have completed scripts. "I'm not doing any union shows, just non-union," he explained. The movie ranch is also staying afloat because it provides sets for photo and fashion shoots.

As for Santa Clarita businesses that have no direct connection to the entertainment industry, it's uncertain what kind of impact the strike has had, according to the Santa Clarita Valley Chamber of Commerce President Larry Mankin.

"I've not heard of any major impact that the strike is having on local companies as of yet," Mankin said. "I think there's a lot of trepidation as to what may happen soon. I've spoken to restaurants and other people in service industries. I've not heard of significant impact on this market at this point in time—certainly not a measurable impact. But it's still pretty early in that process, and everybody's waiting until we (finish) the first quarter of 2008."

In addition to concerns about how the strike will affect the restaurant industry, there are concerns about its potential impact on the mortgage industry. If they continue to be without work, those in the film and television industry might be forced from their homes, Mankin fears.

And what will happen "if you throw a whole host of new homes into a market that is already being impacted by the national economy?" he wonders. "Certainly, the business community would like to see this labor issue resolved."

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