

By Melissa Gasca
Signal Staff Writer
mgasca@the-signal.com
661-259-1234 x518

The booming biz of TV in the SCV

Despite dropoff in movie filming, boom time for small screen

While movie filming in Santa Clarita Valley decreased in 2008, television filming significantly increased here, stabilizing the local economy by providing jobs for industry professionals who already live here.

"We've seen a decrease in movie production as those movies leave California to go to states that have tax incentives," said Jason Crawford, economic development and marketing manager for the city of Santa Clarita.

On-location feature film production posted its weakest quarter ever since tracking began in 1993, according to a Film L.A. Inc. news release.

"With TV productions, they, for the most part, haven't been leaving for the tax incentives and so they're still here in the Los Angeles area," Crawford said. "When the city began the film office about 7 years ago, TV production was one of our main focuses. Since that time, we've (gradually) seen more TV productions based in studios here in Santa Clarita."

As an industry which produces millions of dollars for Santa Clarita's economy, the city's film office and local officials strive to maintain Santa Clarita's place in the film and TV industries.

The office recently picked up the new "Knight Rider" series for the 2008-09 filming season.

Santa Clarita is home to four other network shows including "NCIS," "Big Love" and "The Unit," according to the film office's Web site.

"TV productions are still looking for ways to save costs, working with tighter budgets," Crawford said. "Santa Clarita, while being within the 30-mile zone of Los Angeles, we offer cost-savings for them as opposed to other areas in L.A."

Industry officials are finding ways to attract more production crews here in the face of dwindling interest.

"We've seen a decrease in movie production for many years now as first, Canada began offering tax incentives and other states followed suit," Crawford said at a business luncheon Tuesday.

Santa Clarita's decreasing movie filming and increased TV filming follow the same trend as the rest of L.A. County.

FilmL.A., the nonprofit organization that coordinates permits for on-location filming in the city of Los Angeles, unincorporated parts of Los Angeles County and other local

jurisdictions, announced that on-location feature film and commercial production experienced steep fourth-quarter and annual declines in 2008, while television production finished the quarter and year with positive numbers.

"With feature film production days being down 10 of the last 12 years, we should stop talking about 'runaway production.' It's 'ran-away production'," FilmL.A. President Paul Audley said. "California is not competitive in the market place. We must create an environment that brings back high-dollar film productions, the thousands of jobs they generate and the revenues they pump into our local economy."

Santa Clarita City Councilman Bob Kellar addressed the idea of "runaway" filming from California at a December film office presentation.

"We want to be the most user-friendly valley anywhere when it comes to filming," he said. "We can't afford to let this go away. It belongs not only in California but in Southern California and further more in Santa Clarita."

Kellar said he's setting up discussions with Assemblyman Cameron Smyth, R-Santa Clarita, regarding how Santa Clarita can support any possible legislative efforts to increase film production here.

"If I can do anything in Santa Clarita to support a bill, I would be delighted to go to Sacramento. I would lobby that bill, I will do what I can to create incentives to keep filming in California, if we can keep it (in state), we can keep in Santa Clarita," Kellar said. "I know (Smyth) recognizes the importance of this matter for the state and I'm looking forward to sitting down and having discussions."

For now, the film office does what it can to keep Santa Clarita strong.

City economic development associate Jessica Freude said the film office offers competitively priced permits and quick permit request processing.

"So all of that together makes Santa Clarita a better choice and more financially advantageous choice," Freude said. "We're never going to be able to compete against a New Mexico or Louisiana. We don't have the state incentives that other states do. But if (film crews) are looking to stay in L.A., Santa Clarita is competitive."

The film office also strives to meet production needs.

"We are a community that welcomes filming, and you can feel that welcoming attitude from the residents and businesses, while there are other cities that are burnt out on filming and not as receptive," Crawford said.

A few years ago, producers of "24" wanted to land a helicopter on a busy Los Angeles street.

"We were able to make it work out here and have a landed helicopter, with a mock gunfire scene and explosions on one of the roads," Freude said. "It made it look like an L.A. scene out here without them having to leave the L.A. area."