

Company Town

Hollywood & entertainment industry news

On Location Zombies in Happy Valley? Just another film shoot in Santa Clarita



Tye Sheridan is one of the stars of "Scouts vs. Zombies," shooting in Santa Clarita. (Kevin Winter / Getty Images)

By **RICHARD VERRIER**

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A

group of Boy Scouts huddled behind a Humvee on a quiet residential street.

They had just returned from a camping trip to find that their suburban community had been overtaken — by the walking dead.

As they quietly crossed the street into one of the Scouts' houses, a horde of zombies wandering the streets heard the noise and rushed toward them.

The nighttime scene for the upcoming Paramount Pictures movie "Scouts vs. Zombies" recently came to life in the Happy Valley neighborhood of Newhall, part of the city of Santa Clarita.

The film is the latest in a flurry of movie and TV projects in the northern Los Angeles County city, which is enjoying a record level of production this year.

Even before the fiscal year ends June 30, Santa Clarita has already topped last year's production level. The city has generated 429 permits, 1,129 production days and an estimated \$30.1 million in spending on film, TV and commercial projects, according to the city's film office.

That's up from 368 film permits, 1,069 production days and spending of an estimated \$25.7 million in the prior fiscal year.

"We're excited filming continues to be a thriving activity in Santa Clarita," said Russell Sypowicz, film office administrator for the city of Santa Clarita. "This marks the fourth consecutive year of record growth in terms of permits and the amount of economic impact."

He attributed the increase to a combination of factors, including projects that receive state tax credit and film-friendly policies.

The city refunds basic permit fees for locally based TV shows and movies that receive state film tax credits. Santa Clarita also has picked up business from local rivals. The FX series "The Bridge," for example, moved to Santa Clarita from its former location in the San Fernando Valley.

Santa Clarita's growth partly reflects an overall upswing in location filming across Los Angeles County this year.

Even though the county has seen a long-term decline in big-budget movies and TV shows, location filming is up nearly 30% this year compared with the same time a year ago, according to a Los Angeles Times review of data from FilmL.A. Inc., which handles permits for the city of L.A. and unincorporated areas of the county.

Santa Clarita has been especially busy, mainly because of locally based television series such as FX's "Justified," "Franklin & Bash" on TNT and the TV Land series "Jennifer Falls."

The Santa Clarita area also has picked up more feature film business, including Clint Eastwood's "American Sniper," which recently filmed on an Afghan village set at the Blue Cloud Movie Ranch. "Horrible Bosses 2," "2 Guns" and Disney's "Saving Mr. Banks" also filmed scenes in Santa Clarita.

Set for release in March 2015, "Scouts vs. Zombies" centers on three Scouts who, on the eve of their last camp-out, attempt to save their town from a zombie outbreak. The Scouts are played by Tye Sheridan (best known for his role in the movie "Mud"), Logan Miller and Joey Morgan.

Producers chose to shoot the movie locally after Paramount qualified for a \$3-million tax credit for the project, according to the California Film Commission.

"It was a very important factor," said location manager Stephenson Crossley. "Everyone wanted to keep it in California, and that incentive helped put it over the edge."

The movie, which began filming on May 8, is scheduled to shoot over 37 days. Directed by Christopher Landon ("Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones"), the film is being shot entirely at practical locations, rather than on soundstages or studio back lots.

Locations have included the Angeles National Forest, Seal Beach police station, MacArthur Park and sites in Encino, Carson, San Pedro and Cypress.

The crew will film about two weeks in Newhall, which plays the part of a fictional town called Deer Field. It's an ideal location because it represents a quintessential American suburban town, Crossley said.

Because of intensive filming at various homes in Newhall, the city sent out film notices to nearly 1,000 residents and received few complaints, Sypowicz said.

"We have over 6,000 residents who work in the film and entertainment industry, so the more we can film up here, the less of a commute they have to make it to their jobs," he added.

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