

## LOS ANGELES TIMES

No taxes on your Motel 6 bill: Santa Clarita really wants your film production

04:49 PM PT, Jun 2 2009



Don't try this at home.

At a time when government services are getting slashed and workers furloughed, most municipal governments around the country aren't inclined to give up a revenue opportunity, no matter how small.

Not so in Santa Clarita, which is taking the unusual step of subsidizing film permits and location fees for productions that do most of their filming in the suburban community north of Los Angeles. The incentives also offer partial refunds of hotel taxes paid by production companies for workers.

But the incentives are so small in the scheme of what it costs to make a TV show, that even local officials acknowledge they won't be sufficient to keep a production in town. Rather, the action is meant to show how much the city values the business of film and TV producers. "It's a symbol of support for the film industry," says Jessica Freude, film commissioner for Santa Clarita Valley.

With proximity to the Hollywood studios, abundance of sound stages and movie ranches, Santa Clarita has attracted production of several TV shows in recent years, including the CBS series "NCIS," HBO's "Big Love," Discovery Channel's "Doing Da Vinci" and "The Unit," recently canceled by CBS.

But the bedroom community -- which like Los Angeles faces increased competition from other cities around the country vying for the same business -- isn't leaving anything to chance. The City Council recently approved a film incentive program, which takes effect next month, that could cost it as much as \$150,000 a year in lost permit fees and hotel tax revenue. A TV show that shoots principally in the city could save as much as \$20,000 annually -- pennies compared to the million-dollar budgets of scripted TV series.

City officials argue that the economic benefits of retaining and expanding film and TV productions more than offset the cost of the incentives. Film and TV productions pumped an estimated \$20 million into the Santa Clarita economy last year.

"The return on investment is substantial for our community," says Freude.

Meanwhile, 30 miles to the south, the Los Angeles City Council has yet to work out the details of its film incentive program.

-- Richard Verrier

*Photo: Shooting a movie in Santa Clarita. Credit: Sidney Baldwin / Universal Studios*