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## A Film Industry Grows In Idaho

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The screenplay was written by a woman who wrote scripts for Disney. The cinematographer, Don Thorin, has shot films including *An Officer and a Gentleman* and *Scent of a Woman*. The director, Ted Parvin, worked with directors like Alfred Hitchcock and Otto Preminger in his long Hollywood career.

It was a two-minute short film recorded in downtown Coeur d'Alene called *Old Things* that featured a hard-of-hearing man and his blind dog, and it's one example of the kind of creative and collaborative filmmaking that's starting to flourish across the state.

The film was a mentoring project organized by the Kootenai and North Idaho Film & Video Entertainment Society, a network of aspiring professionals who want to work in the film and media industries. The group, which offers workshops and training, has grown from four members to more than 100 in just a few years, said president W.J. Lazerus. The production included 25 staff with varying degrees of experience.

"There seems to be a real desire in the area for people to learn about a career in the media arts," Lazerus said. "It's been a great collaboration of like spirits."

That communal approach characterizes much of the growing film community in Idaho. Increasing numbers of people living in the state have developed skills by experimenting here or by working in Hollywood or New York City. A number of people in the community say Idaho is now on the cusp of building enough talent and infrastructure to create a sustainable film industry, including both homespun independent films and out-of-state productions.

"Just under the surface of the landscape is this burgeoning industry with talented people that are just ready to get up and go," said Louise Luster, an award-winning screenwriter who started CTP Films LLC in 2004 to find marketable scripts and to build a film industry in Idaho. "It's there. It's ready to go. It just takes somebody to step forward and say, 'I want to provide financial support to get this industry off the ground.'"

Luster was executive producer for a feature-length documentary, *The Fall of '55*, which premiered at film festivals in 2006 and secured distribution. She has already lined up experienced Hollywood production staff and distribution interest for CTP's next feature-length film, *Stand Tall!*, a dramatization of the story of an Army whistleblower who lives in Boise. Independent producer Tory Von Wolfe is currently seeking investors for that project and several other films that are slated for production in Idaho.

Grant Allan, who helped finance more than 130 film and TV productions in Vancouver, British Columbia, over a 15-year period, is now betting that the Treasure Valley can build its own production industry. He plans to build the Idaho Studios at Bryans Run, a planned community that would house a six-stage sound studio and up to 7,000 homes on 1,400 acres just off the Black Creeks exit of Interstate 84. The project has been delayed to a 2011 opening by the housing downturn and economic slowdown but is now in the engineering phase.

Allan believes his state-of-the-art studios, wired with fiber optic cable, could attract TV pilots and series looking for a more affordable place to shoot than southern California, though just a short plane ride away.

"I know it can get done here," he said. "It takes community will to do it, at the business level, the investor level and the government level to do it. If people want it to happen, it'll happen."

The benefits could be significant. Not only do film and TV productions employ a range of skilled workers who earn high-paying salaries; they also require contract workers and can be worth millions of dollars to the local economy.

When "Dante's Peak" was filmed in Wallace more than a decade ago, it was responsible for \$12 million in spending over a three-month period, said Peg Owens of the Idaho Film Office. One bicycle store, for example, completely sold out when the crew started buying bikes to travel around town, she said.

A major film production may also need the services of caterers, electricians, carpenters, painters, truck drivers, scenic artists, seamstresses and makeup artists, many of whom may be local. They may need to rent or buy cars and office equipment and pay location fees to residents or businesses.

Best of all, the film industry is largely recession proof, with spending on entertainment often increasing during tough times.

The major impediment to attracting an out-of-state TV or film shoot is that Idaho has no major tax incentive to entice producers, while nearly all 50 states have them. New Mexico, for example, helped build its thriving industry by offering a 25 percent tax rebate, interest-free loans, no sales tax and reimbursement for on-the-job training.

Earlier this year, the Idaho Legislature approved a 20 percent tax rebate for productions that spend \$200,000 in the state and employ 20 percent of Idaho

workers. However, lawmakers have yet to fund that program and are unlikely to do so in the upcoming legislative session because of the teetering economy.

"We are not going to get movies produced here without an incentive," Owens said. "We are a beautiful state. We are welcoming. We have a lot of charming towns to stay in. But when we are surrounded by states that have the topography and the workforce, it's just impossible to compete without incentives."

Still, the film community may flourish even without out-of-state productions.

Bruce Fletcher, director of the Idaho International Film Festival, said all the filmmakers he talks to mention that the quality of the festival's submissions has improved since it started in 2003. And, he said, Idaho brings out "a kind of a creative energy fostered by isolation."

"The local community has flowered," he said. "I think that it's progressed by leaps and bounds and expanded. It's statewide now. We're getting submissions from all over."

A few Idaho filmmakers are even starting to gain national attention. Heather Rae, who lives in Boise, produced the movie "Frozen River," which won the 2008 Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival.

Last week, the magazine Variety announced that Rae will produce a film with star America Ferrera. The movie will be filmed in New Mexico.

*By Simon Shifrin*

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