

Ascension part of multi-parish project to bring in movie production

By AARON E. Looney The Ascension Citizen

Ascension Parish is on the map in terms of the motion picture industry, the parish's economic development director told the Parish Council during its Nov. 17 meeting.

Martha Collins told the council that a recent trip to Los Angeles as part of the Louisiana Capital Area Economic Development Association (LaCAEDA)'s Film Commission helped to promote the Baton Rouge area - including Ascension Parish - as a prime location for film production.

“The people we talked to while in California thought that we were all washed away and that the state of Louisiana could not produce films anymore,” Collins said. “I think we sent two messages: Louisiana is still open for business to the film industry and that the Capital region is very conducive to provide those services.”

LaCAEDA is comprised of Ascension, East and West Baton Rouge, East and West Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee and St. Helena parishes, Collins said. The group aims at bringing economic development to the Baton Rouge area, with the film industry as one of its top markets.

One such film that is coming to the area is “Instant Karma,” an \$80 million project which is being produced by Digital Domain Films and Scheherazade Productions.

“These people have won and been nominated for numerous Academy Awards,” Collins said of those behind the film. “We're very excited to have this caliber of film shot here in our area.”

Digital Domain is best known for its groundbreaking visual effects work in such movies as “Titanic,” “Apollo 13,” “The Fifth Element,” “The Day After Tomorrow” and “I, Robot.”

Scheherazade's team of Terry Rossio and Ted Elliot has worked on the writing of such films as “Shrek,” “The Pirates of the Caribbean” trilogy and “Aladdin.” The two are also serving as executive producers on “Déjà vu,” a film starring Academy Award winner Denzel Washington, which is also being produced in Louisiana.

One of the major drawing points for the film industry to Louisiana has been the lofty tax incentives offered by the state, Collins said.

“Louisiana has the most beneficial tax incentives, bar none,” Collins said. “We're recognized as the best in the nation and in the continent.”

According to information from The Internet Movie Database web site, “Instant Karma” is an adventure comedy film starring Pierce Brosnan, Dom DeLuise, David Alan Grier, Ertha Kitt, Burt Reynolds, The Rock, Mira Sorvino, Gene Wilder and more. The film is described as “a visual effects-laden comedy about a safecracker who dies and is reincarnated as a series of animals.”

The movie will be distributed by New Line Cinema.

“Louisiana plays a major role in ‘Instant Karma,’” said Scott Ross, CEO and founder of Digital Domain. “We originally intended for this film to be shot in the state of Louisiana, and we are very

excited about working with Emerald Bayou Studios.”

Owned by veteran film industry professionals Linda Thurman and Marquetta Cheeks, Emerald Bayou Studios is developing a 40,000 square foot sound stage in Pointe Coupee Parish, with input from Digital Domain.

In addition, an 11-acre site in East Feliciana Parish has been chosen to house the Louisiana Film Center backlot, Collins said.

LaCAEDA plans to bring the many aspects of film production to the region, Collins said, with individual offices and locations in each of the parishes.

“There will be a back lot in one parish, and a production studio in another,” Collins said. “When we finish our plan, we will have something in every parish. We will not compete with each other, but we will enhance the overall project.”

Collins also said that LaCAEDA is building a database for local talent in both acting and production, so that local residents may be used in the production process if possible.

“I found there was a set designer that they fly into Los Angeles two to three times a month to do commercials who lives in Prairieville,” Collins said. “There's a prop designer who lives here who is actually the brother of one of our Parish Council members, Kent Schexnaydre. We talked to him a little bit. He's in the specialty part of design.

“I think this will be a new arena for us that can bring dollars into the parish.” Collins said. “That was one of the goals that we wanted to work toward. We got a good bit of press, so I think Ascension Parish has been put on the map in the film arena.”