

New B.C. shoots unconfirmed

February 28, 2005
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By Ian Edwards

Vancouver: On Feb. 11, B.C.'s Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development issued a self-congratulatory release about new business generated by the boosting of the service and domestic tax credits, announced on Jan. 20.

"Since our announcement, six feature films and five television projects have confirmed British Columbia as their first location choice, creating significant job opportunities for B.C.'s 30,000 film and television employees," says John Les, minister in charge. He did not name specific projects, but pegged the value of the new shoots at \$350 million. "This government continues to work hand-in-hand with this industry to ensure British Columbia remains one of the best places on earth for film and television production."

Okay, kind of, maybe.

In trying to dig up specifics, Playback has found that no projects have signed since the announcement of tax-credit changes, which boosted the service credit from 11% to 18% of eligible labor costs on foreign productions. But interest is there and budgeting is going on.

X-Men 3, the US\$100-million-plus Fox sequel to X-Men/X2, is still eyeing Vancouver for a summer shoot, but nothing is confirmed.

"B.C. has always been a great place to make movies and the increased tax-incentive program has moved British Columbia to the top of my list as a destination of choice for X-Men 3," says Ross Fanger, coproducer of made-in-B.C. features X2 and Fantastic Four.

In the Land of Women, a US\$20-million Castle Rock/WB feature with Meg Ryan in the lead, is looking at Victoria.

The Kate Hudson feature I Dream of Jeannie, worth about US\$60 million, might go for Sony. Another might-go for Sony is RV with Robin Williams. It's worth US\$30 million or more.

The B.C. government tabled changes Feb. 15 to the province's production tax credits, upping breaks for service shoots to 18% and boosting domestic production to 30% from 20%.

In TV, the pilots continue to stay largely in L.A. But along with Painkiller Jane, previously reported in Playback, there is the possibility of B.C. getting the Touchstone navy pilot Quantico and the NBC/Universal pilot Eureka.

As one unnamed insider says: "We're still not up to our huge numbers."

Of course, the local producers invested in the tax credits are talking up their unnamed new

business.

"Since January, our company has booked more than \$60 million worth of new productions," says Shawn Williamson of Vancouver's Brightlight Pictures.

In that tally, Williamson counts the video-game feature *Dungeon Siege* (with Boll KG of Germany), budgeted at \$60-million, which goes mid-July, and the horror *Whisper* (a \$15-million budget for Gold Circle/Universal), which goes mid-April.

"These are productions that would have gone to Ontario," says Williamson.

Dungeon Siege, in particular, was ready to move production despite starting prep because of the cost advantages in Ontario before the rates were leveled.

"There are so many advantages to shooting in B.C. and this puts us on a very competitive footing," he says. "I hope there's going to be a huge influx of work."

Following inaction by the B.C. government to respond to Ontario's Christmastime gift to service producers, the Motion Picture Production Industry Association of B.C. and others on the West Coast launched a do-or-die-style lobby campaign that outlined the loss of economy and jobs by productions that would move east. The B.C. government matched the Ontario incentives on Jan. 20.

The higher tax-credit rates are effective retroactively to Jan. 1 and will continue until March 31, 2006. *

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Of course, local producers with a vested interest in the tax credits are talking up their new business since B.C. moved to match production tax credits in Ontario and Quebec.

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