

The Hidden Gem: Putting the South Back on the Map

BY JOHN FOOTE GUEST COLUMNIST

Pay attention, Hollywood. Southern Oregon is armed with beautiful diverse scenery, city and community support, and a core resource of professionals armed and eager to reclaim its indie film title that slipped through its grasp.

In the 1980s and '90s, Southern Oregon was onto something fun, new, exciting and lucrative for the local economy. The "Hollywood" film industry had made its presence felt with a few great films: *Stand By Me*, *Inherit the Wind*, *The River Wild*, and *Dead Man*. The area was abuzz and a few companies and a handful of locals really felt they were looking at the start of a long career in this amazing industry.

Well, the industry did come to Oregon, but passed Southern Oregon by and went right on up I-5 to settle in the state's bigger urban centers—Portland and its surrounding communities.

The fire died down in Southern Oregon. Many people moved out of the area or onto other career paths and the region's resource group went defunct. A few faithfuls chose to stay in the area, diversify their skill set across the many different industry platforms, and continue to enjoy the quality of life for which the Southern Oregon region is famous. Over the next decade, enough projects snuck into the area to keep the fires burning and the hope alive. The locals knew Southern Oregon to be a hidden gem just waiting to be re-discovered.

Now, Southern Oregon is making its move to be recognized

as a major filming destination. In the last three years alone several major independents have chosen Southern Oregon to host their film and media projects, among them *Conversations with God* by noted filmmaker Stephen Simon; Darkhorse Entertainment's *My Name is Bruce*, directed by and starring Bruce Campbell; and *Calvin Marshall* starring Steve Zahn. The Ashland Independent Film Festival (AIFF) is moving into its ninth season and is regarded as a strong festival for both Hollywood and independent fare.

With all of this new buzz happening in Southern Oregon, the old faithfuls have blown the dust of their ditty bags and lenses, joined by the new breed of industry talent. The region's premier 70,000-square-foot film production facility, Land Mind Productions, is rigged and ready for an

influx of projects. The newly formed Southern Oregon Film and Television (SOFaT) organization, a film resource group founded by locally-based line producer Gary Kout, has formed to support, develop and sustain the industry here.

But perhaps the biggest endorsement of all comes from the large retired contingent of long-time Hollywood professional who have found the hills of Ashland, the orchards of Jacksonville, the championship golf courses of Medford, and the overall environment of Southern Oregon to be the relaxed picture-perfect home after the hustle and bustle of a long career in Hollywood.

John Foote is owner of Land Mind Productions in Medford, Oregon. www.landmind.net.