

Southern Oregon Grows Stronger with SOFaT

BY GARY KOUT, SOUTHERN OREGON
FILM AND TELEVISION

Last year around this time, I wrote an article for this magazine entitled "The New Face of Southern Oregon Film", introducing Southern Oregon Film and Television, a networking group I founded to connect the film and media professionals living in the area and promote the region to producers looking for a place to make their next project. At the time, the group operated primarily as an online chat-room, but plans were afoot to take the group to the next level.

A year later, SOFaT, as it is more commonly known, has come a long way. Now a 501(c)6 non-profit trade association with an operating budget covered by grants and modest membership dues, a member board and committee chairs, SOFaT is posi-

tioned as the principal representative of the film and media industry across the entire Southern Oregon region.

Still charged with the initial purpose of networking and marketing, SOFaT now provides in-depth information to interested filmmakers, assists in scouting and securing public and private locations, and helps find local crew and cast, vendors and support services. SOFaT also maintains a calendar of social events and educational seminars, collaborates with the other film and media associations around the state, and advocates for the film industry both locally and statewide through close relationships with elected officials.

SOFaT's main presence is a newly launched Web site: www.filmsouthernoregon.org. The site boasts a searchable directory of filmmakers and

technicians, vendors, and associated businesses. Visitors can read an in-depth description of the film incentives offered by the state of Oregon, with a link directly to the State Film Office. This site also includes location photos of the Southern Oregon region, from remote natural settings to the population centers to set photos from previous productions; a filmography of the region; links to city, county and state resources; cultural activities; and information about getting to the region. The site is designed to be very user-friendly, and SOFaT members can access their own listings to update credits, contact information, upload their resume and videos, and renew their membership.

With SOFaT securely in place and getting stronger by the day, the rest of the region's offerings will now be even more significant

and effective. With a lengthy filmography that belies its tucked-away location, cameras have been rolling in the region since the birth of cinema: *Passengers Alighting and Drinking Water* made in 1903, when audiences marveled at the mere sight of a train pulling into the station, right up to the recently-filmed independent film *Calvin Marshall* (premiering in 2009). Since 2000, Southern Oregon has played host in part or in full to no less than 40 full-length narrative, documentary, and television productions, in addition to numerous shorts, commercial, corporate, and educational films.

Weather-wise, Southern Oregon (along with a sister region just across the border in Northern California, together referred to as the mythical State of Jefferson) actually shares weather patterns more similar to Southern California. Technically

termed a semi-arid desert, summers are hot and dry, and winters are cool and wet with snow at the higher elevations. But it's the in-betweens that really impress—a spring that bursts with vibrant colors and an autumn of deep rich hues. With four distinct seasons, all beautiful and none too extreme, Southern Oregon allows for excellent year-round filmmaking opportunities.

Just about any script can find its locations in Southern Oregon. Due to its long history, rich heritage and modern sensibility, filmmakers will find every look but urban, and any time period but a sci-fi future. Contemporary suburban neighbors are right down the road from sprawling fruit orchards. Small-town Main Street is just a few clicks from contemporary shopping centers. Modern mountain estates lie within a short drive of hundred-year-old farmhouses. Clubs, restaurants,

hotels, offices, bowling alleys, stores and more are available for filming, as well as providing great amenities and activities to any visiting production.

Want to build your location? A 7,000-square-foot soundstage with two-wall cyc, full set building facility, props and set dressing warehouse, and production support space can be found in Medford. Local and community television stations can also provide stage space.

Great Oregon filming incentives* only add to the low cost, easy permitting and very film-friendly attitude of local governments, businesses and residents.

When a recent feature film wanted to capture the Winter Parade, the Ashland Chamber of Commerce handled permissions and releases from all the parade's participants at no charge. The City of Medford provided no-cost Community Service Officers to close a multi-block section of its downtown to facil-

itate a street scene. The airport allowed a private jet to park in the prized jet-way parking spot all day so it could be a background element for a scene. Anecdotes of community assistance, both public and private, are just too many to relate.

The final elements that make Southern Oregon a prime place for filmmaking—the great crews, casts, and vendors. Thanks to frequent filmmaking and close proximity and easy access to the larger markets of Portland, the Bay Area, and Los Angeles, the area is home to many experienced filmmakers and technicians, from producers to directors, directors of photography to camera assistants, sound mixers, grips, gaffers, vanities, transpo, etc.

A producer can bring whomever they want, but they don't need to bring anyone! Looking for on-camera talent? Filmmakers will have no problem filling leading or supporting

roles, as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and many other local theaters both incubate and attract high-level talent with strong on-camera experience. High-definition camera equipment, grip and lighting trucks, sound gear, and complete post-production services round out the script-to-screen potential of Southern Oregon.

With all that the region has to offer and SOFaT spreading the word, the list of films made in Southern Oregon is sure to get even longer.

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*Budget thresholds apply. Please contact SOFaT or the Oregon Film Office for details.