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Lights, Camera, Action! Terrebonne trying to break into films

by BRIAN FONTENOT

The Terrebonne Economic Development Authority has about 10 film projects, but has not gotten any confirmation on them.

"We're kind of divesting ourselves into it as far as just deciding that it is a target market," said TEDA Recruitment Director Michelle Cardwell Edwards. "So, we still have a lot of homework to do."

TEDA usually gets the projects through strategic partners like the Louisiana Film and Video Commission, which puts out blanket, regional requests for locations and workers.

Edwards explained the process is more top-down than bottom-up.

Site consultants working for studios go through the state offices rather than jumping right to the local offices.

This is due, in part, to the fact no single area will likely have all the locations a film will need for shooting.

"Locations per movie are very, very specific about the (filming sites)," said Houma Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau Executive Director Sharon Alford. "Some of the movies, we really have nothing here that fits their requests, but there are others that we do."

As far as getting into the production side of film and building studios in the parish, Edwards explained it would be difficult for Terrebonne Parish to pull off.

"For us, it would be a major undertaking to build a studio," said Edwards. "That's not really in our plans at this time, because of the expense of it."

"It may be something that we can look at in the future," Alford added.

But building studios in Louisiana is possible. Edwards referenced Emerald Bayou Studios, which plans to spend about \$100 million on its facilities over the next couple of years.

Edwards said TEDA is working with other agencies to realize its goal.

"We're planning to really move forward with our partnership with the Houma-Terrebonne Visitor's Bureau," said Edwards.

Part of the partnership includes working with the bureau to piece together a catalogue to target the film industry specifically in 2008.

Such a catalogue would contain information on locations, as well as photos of locations, and a directory of local workers with specific skills valuable to the industry.

"They will be able to, at a glance, find specific people for movies," said Edwards.

The catalog is still waiting for approval from the state for marketing match grants before it can go forward.

Also, the notices for the need for a location often come on tight deadlines. This means it can sometimes be difficult to find a suitable location in the parish, take photos or video of it and return it to the site location consultant.

The future could hold the Visitors Bureau and TEDA putting together a kind of quick response team, as well as having a library of shots of various locations in the parish to handle such short notice requests.

Alford said the two most popular, or most used, locations in the parish are the Ormond and Magnolia Plantations.

"We've also done many, many films here in the area that were located on the wetlands," said Alford.

Alford said one of the first locations requests she had to deal with was a producer looking for a half-mile bayou stretch with vegetation, no house and no buildings.

The site would have been used for the film "Anaconda," and needed to resemble a location in South America.

To pull this off, however, the site would have required a half-mile bayou stretch without any cypress trees, something not easy to find.

So, "Anaconda" was not filmed in Terrebonne.

"We tried," said Alford. "By the time the movie hit the box office, it was different than the script we saw."

Edwards said the parish is still in its infancy stages as far as putting together marketing information to target the film industry.

She also said the film industry isn't a long-term moneymaker, but developing it in the parish is the definition of economic development, as it brings new money into the area.

Edwards explained that two-thirds of a \$10 million production in the parish would go into the parish

through the use of restaurants, gifts, employment and all the other things a film company would need while filming in the area.

Terrebonne Parish was the subject of "The Skeleton Key" in 2005, although the movie was not actually filmed in the area.

"The Apostle," "Because of Winn-Dixie" and Martin Folse's "Nutria Man: Terror in the Swamp" were filmed locally.