

 BACK

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 FEEDBACK

Hollywood comes to town

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Staff Reporter
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When the director yells "quiet on the set," the normal clatter and bang in the restaurant kitchen ceases so the scene can get shot. It's a drill they're getting used to at Jim's Pizza, Steak and Seafood on 224 Street.

For the past year, the eatery has been used for shooting three movies as the film industry recovers from a slump while now starting to discover Maple Ridge.

The increased interest has been noticed in the District of Maple Ridge's economic development office, where so far 70 location filming permits have been issued this year. Last year, 12 were issued. At Jim's Pizza, the film crews like to shoot in the diner-like atmosphere of the restaurant and use the second floor for equipment and staff. Meanwhile, the kitchen keeps running so Jim's can supply its take-out customers.

One film shot last year, *Eve's Christmas*, involved turning the downstairs into a diner called Winky's. That movie aired on television in December.

Restaurant manager Nick Daflos enjoyed seeing his restaurant on screen. "It was really interesting how they worked it out so it was a pretty interesting experience overall," Daflos said.

"They're really courteous and we're really courteous here. I think that's why they keep coming back."

Since last fall, Jim's Pizza also was used for *Home for the Holidays* and *Truth*.

But determining the economic boost of Hollywood coming to town is difficult, said Rick Laferriere with the economic development department.

Film crews visit restaurants, buy food and building supplies, use local services and accommodation. But some stay in the area and some commute for daily shoots. Manpower used for each film varies.

Given each of the shooting permit fees costs \$200 each, district coffers are at least \$10,000 ahead this year.

The district's good fortune may be simply because it's just turning out to be a good year for the movie business.

The 18-per-cent provincial tax credit for labour costs took effect this January. That now means B.C. is competitive with Ontario.

As well, a further six-per-cent credit is available for films shot outside greater Vancouver. The boundary that roughly follows 200 Street means Maple Ridge is one of the municipalities closest to Vancouver, which has the extra six-per-cent tax credit.

Pitt Meadows is not as fortunate because the line bisects the district.

Promotion and good service to the film industry also helps Maple Ridge make its name in movies.

Laferriere's office made sure the B.C. Film Commission knew about all the film locations here as the commission converted its location image catalogue to digital form.

The district also waives location permit fees if there are several shots done in a short period of time and it's trying to find ways of speeding up the permit process.

Boosting the district as a filming location helps.

"It's increased interest in the area, increased focus on promoting the region," Laferriere said.

"We're working quite diligently at promoting ourselves to the film industry as a quality location."

Jayne Aster, also with the economic development office, works with the film location managers and issues the location permits after she confers with district engineers and traffic technologists.

While her job title is administrative assistant, she's spending much of her time on the movie business.

"It's a lot," she said.

Maple Ridge's funky downtown is one thing that entices movie makers.

Location managers like the modern glass-and-steel look of the Arts Centre Theatre, which has doubled as an airport terminal, a New York penthouse and a Los Angeles high-rise.

The old Maple Ridge courthouse is convenient for film crews because it's currently vacant. In addition to being used for legal drama, its wood-panelled offices have stood in for a newsroom, hotel rooms and a U.S. governor's office.

But they also like the older shops and places such as Jim's Pizza and, a few steps away, the rustic Ba' Bilia's Books.

Irena Mohr with Ba' Bilia's has had her cosy store used for *Eve's Christmas* and *Home for the Holidays*.

The latter involved almost no disturbance for her shop.

"It was very little. They just shifted things around a bit," she said.

Mohr said she doesn't mind closing her shop for the day.

"I enjoy it. It's fun for the town. People are excited. They stop and take pictures. It creates an atmosphere downtown - I'm glad to be part of it."

During the past year, *Home for the Holidays*, *Criminal Intent* and *Truth* have been shot in Maple Ridge as has the TV series *Young Blades*

Insight Film and Video of Vancouver, which produced all of the above, seems to have made a second home in Maple Ridge.

It also shot *Eve's Christmas* and *Too Cool for Christmas*. Much of the latter took place in Haney Place Mall.

And while Insight's shooting of *Home for the Holidays* has just wrapped up, the Christmas decorations on 224 Street will stay awhile longer. The company's starting Deck the Halls this week to continue to the end of August.

Other productions such as *Battle Star Galactica* and *Catch and Release* (partly shot at Iron Mountain general store) were also shot here as will be the feature film *Dragon Siege*. Brightlight Pictures Inc. of North Vancouver shoots that film this weekend in the British Columbia Institute of Technology woodlot north of Dewdney Trunk Road.

"It's a pretty big production," Aster said.

Filming of *Wickerman*, a remake of an old horror movie about pagan human sacrifice and featuring Nicholas Cage. It was shot on the Bordertown television set in north Pitt Meadows this past week.

The productions also have brought out the stars. Jennifer Garner, Linda Purl and Sam Neil have graced Maple Ridge streets.

Cage seemed to fly in by helicopter every day for *Wickerman*, Aster said.

Aster figures it was during a recent break in shooting that Garner nipped out and married Ben Affleck.



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(Above) Nick Daflos takes lasagna out of the oven at Jim's Pizza, where three movies have been shot; (below) Ba' Bilia's Books on 224 Street has been used for two.