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Film Industry Showcases Area Towns and Venues

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*Actors and film crew members work out a scene for the movie *The Epoch*, which*

was filmed near Jefferson.

They're selling East Texas. From a small office in Longview comes all the information a producer would need to pick a filming location for a movie or TV show.

Their website works like a real estate listing service. Photos pop up of enumerable sites, including courthouses, water towers, cemeteries, parks, schools, bodies of water, businesses, classic cars, ranches, and historic homes. A movie producer could pick Marietta's City Hall, an empty parking lot in Longview, the Hodge Podge Cabins in Uncertain, or Bo Pilgrim's bighead in Pittsburg, among many others.

The Northeast Texas Regional Film Commission has been assisting film, television, and media professionals find the resources, locations, and trades people and "extras" they need for their production needs since 2006. The agency represents a 21-county area.

Well-known projects that have hit either the big or small screen over the years have included *The Great Debators* (2007), starring Denzel Washington, about the famed Wiley College team from Marshall; and TV episodes of *Extreme Makeover* and a filming by Animal Planet.

The movie *The Epoch* will be filmed in Jefferson in March through the locator service. The story, first appearing in a novel, follows emotional and cultural changes felt by a young girl in Brazil in the 19th century when issues of slavery, human rights and the place of women in society are debated.

"Jefferson stole my heart from the time I saw its welcome sign," said the writer who requested anonymity. The city attracted her because of its historic and authentic look and because good actors and filmmakers were available in the region.

The commission's purpose is primarily to contribute to the Lone Star State's economy. "When movie and TV productions come to the area they are only there a short time and require little infrastructure. They stay in local hotels and eat at local restaurants which helps the economy," said Ron Hollomon, commission director.

In 2008, Camp Fern, located between Marshall and Henderson was the selected as the site for the production of the movie Friday the 13th, the 12th installment of that franchise. In the two days they were on Camp Fern, \$100,000 was spent on hotel, meals, gas, location fees, parking, road work, lawn mowing, police, equipment rentals, and food catering services.

The same can be said for Mineola where in 2013 the cast and crew worked for three weeks on the movie The Bigfoot Wars. According to Lynda Rauscher, Mineola's community development director, the film company used local retailers, restaurants, contractors, carpenters, and various others to work on the film. "The City of Mineola experienced greater sales tax revenue during the time the cast and crew was in our community," she said.

Why East Texas? Why not? Nicholle Walton-Durban has produced three films there: Bigfoot Wars, and Shadow People and Sprit Riders, both shot in Winnsboro.

"We love shooting our movies in that area; the towns are always so accommodating and helpful," she said.

Filmmakers are drawn here because of ambience, ease of movement, low traffic, town squares, large lakes, and large wooded areas. There is also a large population interested in filmmaking who come out to be cast as extras in the movies. This teaches people about film production as well as creating a following for the movie.

There are advantages for media companies, too, in the form of financial incentives and deals. Texas Film Commission, under the Office of the Governor, provides qualifying film, television, commercial, visual effects, and video game productions the opportunity to receive cash grants based on a percentage of a project's eligible Texas expenditures, including eligible wages paid to Texas residents.

The Northeast Texas regional office is actually funded by cities and counties located there. Each entity represented pay annual dues or help sponsor the organization. The support makes the city, town or county a "film friendly" locale. Interesting sites are photographed and offered, like the others, to prospective producers. The Texas

Film Commission also provides training and marketing advice to community representatives through the Film Friendly Texas program.

Increasing the media production industry in East Texas is possible, said Holloman, because just across the eastern border, Louisiana has achieved an enviable attraction for producers. “Louisiana sees movie and film production in the Shreveport-Bossier area and New Orleans,” Hollomon said.

If you would like to see how your city or county can become “film friendly” contact 903-241-1144 or hollomon.ronald@sbcglobal.net.

Marshall, Camp Fern, Jefferson, Pittsburg, and Lake of the Pines have all been locations for movie production in the last five years. These locations seem to frequent horror and zombie movies. Young people from the area come out and dress in blood and gore to be cast as extras in the zombie roles.

Lake of the Pines becomes the salt-water lake that was stocked with massive flesh-eating sharks in the 2010 movie Shark Night 3D. “They used mechanical shark heads and floating shark bodies to create the scenes,” said Belinda Blalock-Brunson, deputy director of the commission.

For a full list of all movies and television shows filmed in East Texas, visit www.netexasmovies.com.