

Alliance Monthly

A West Michigan Film Video Alliance Publication

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Alliance Monthly

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-Dirk Eichhorst, WMFVA Board of Directors



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The West Michigan Film Video Alliance (WMFVA) is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to promoting a thriving film and video production community in our region. Founded in 2005. More information is on our website, www.wmfva.org. For advertising opportunities, please contact us at newsletter@wmfva.org.

Welcome Back

Hi Everyone! I'm Jim Idema, the new editor for the WMFVA newsletter. In case you haven't noticed, the newsletter has changed a bit, and we hope you like what we've done. As has always been the case, the newsletter is designed to keep you, our members and friends, up to date on what the Alliance is doing as well as what is happening in West Michigan film, but as you can imagine, we can't do it without your help. Therefore, if you have any news you think we should include in future issues, please let us know. Of course, since it's also important that we make the newsletter everything you expect it to be, we also welcome your comments regarding what we are doing as a publication and how can improve. My email is newsletter@wmfva.org so please feel free to drop me a line. Just so you know, new guidelines for advertising are also being developed with more details to come. In fact, take a peek at the ads in this issue and let us know your thoughts.

One last thing, please join me in thanking Angie Brown, WMFVA Board of Directors liaison, for her work with me on the newsletter. As the new editor I realize I have a big job ahead, but with your help, I think we stand a fair chance of success.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Editor-in-Chief

“The Genesis Code” Begins Filming

New film invades West Michigan
By Jim Idema

Once again West Michigan is the destination for a feature film, and this time, it's the American Saga Production of “The Genesis Code.”

While some shooting takes place in Lowell, the DeltaPlex and possibly the Van Andel Arena, Calvin College also provides the back drop for this story of a hockey player and a fellow student struggling to find common ground between their spiritual faith and their scientific studies.

Directing the production is Patrick Read Johnson (“Baby’s Day Out”) and heading up the cast is Oscar winner Ernest Borgnine along with newcomers Kelsey Sanders and Logan Bartholomew, former presidential candidate Fred Thompson, Louise Fletcher, Catherine Hicks (“TV’s “7th Heaven) and Lance Henriksen (“Aliens,” “Near Dark”).

The film is budgeted at just under \$10 million, with nearly \$4 million of that expected to be pumped into the local economy. The Grand Rapids Press reports that seventy percent of American Saga’s investments are from West Michigan.

American Saga Productions was formed in 2008 by a group of investors headed up by industry vet Nick Grillo (“Hunt for Red October,” “Clear and Present Danger”) and Jerry Offsay, former president of programming for Showtime and now president of his own company, Parkchester Prods.

The goal of American Saga, according to the company’s parent, Sentinel America, is to create films that “the whole family can enjoy.”

Like the “Chaos Experiment” shot here last summer, “The Genesis Code” has been approved for the Michigan Tax Incentives passed nearly two years ago by Governor Granholm.



Lori Niedenfuer Cool | The Grand Rapids Press

Actor Kelsey Sanders takes a break from filming during the shooting of “The Genesis Code,” at the Science Building on Calvin College’s campus in Grand Rapids.

American Saga held open auditions earlier in the year for local extras and many from the West Michigan area were cast.



WMFVA and MCA-I Join Forces for Mixer

By Jim Idema

The WMFVA and MCA-I have decided to have a party and you are all invited.

The party, aptly named "The Mid-Summer Mixer," is being co-sponsored by both groups in an effort to encourage networking between the two groups. The mixer will be held at Millennium Park on Butterworth Drive SW on Friday, September 18, 2009 from 5am to dusk, and anyone attending can expect an evening of food, fun and networking.

Those planning to attend are encouraged to bring their own drink (beer and wine OK, liquor NOT OK), a dish to pass and games such as volleyball, etc. Further, drawings will be held throughout the mixer for door prizes.

Organizers state that while they "understand and appreciate the importance of families," they hope to keep this event limited to the grown-ups this time around.

"This will be a great opportunity for film & video talent from two professional organizations, who might not otherwise meet, to hook up, talk shop, ask questions, and have fun," said WMFVA board member and Membership Committee Chair Dirk Eichhorst.

MCA-I board member Dawn Butler echoes those sentiments. "I am very excited to see that both of these great groups can get together and help contribute to the commercial and filming industry in West Michigan. Wouldn't it be great for this to become an annual event?"



Our aim is to generate a new creative and economic force regionally dedicated to the art and business of filmmaking and video production. We do this by providing programs, resources, networking, and support to filmmakers while promoting West Michigan as vital and influential in this industry.

To contact us regarding advertising in the newsletter, please be sure to send an email to newsletter@wmfva.org and include "WMFVA Newsletter Advertising" in the subject line.

Cover Story



Two Grand Rapids Film Festivals Debut

By Jim Idema

What was once only a luxury for large cities and frozen Utah mountains, the film festival circuit has now decided to bring its wares to Grand Rapids with not one, but two film festivals slated for August, 2009.



The first, the Grand Rapids Film Festival, will be held August 26-28 at Celebration Cinema North located at 2121 Celebration Drive NE in Grand Rapids, just off the East Beltline.

Organizers believe that this festival, designed “to benefit the filmmaker, the audience and the community,” will reflect the community’s values and ideals while still showing films that send a message to the viewer.

The festival will feature a kick-off party Wednesday night, and will follow with two WMFVA-sponsored panel discussions

Thursday and Friday morning—called “Making Movies in Michigan” and “...How Academia Can Help” collectively—with with a host of feature, documentary and short films sprinkled in for good measure.

For more information on the Grand Rapids Film Festival, visit the website at www.grfilmfestival.com.


As for the other film festival, the Michigan Film Festival hopes “...to promote the Michigan perspective in film by hosting an event that includes an exhibition venue that features recently crafted works by Michigan filmmakers, offers workshops and lectures under a common theme, and builds partnerships between local entities currently involved in supporting the Michigan film industry.”




The Michigan Film Festival will be held August 28-29 at the Grand Rapids Art Museum located at 101 Monroe Center NW, and the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, located at 41 Sheldon SE, both in Grand Rapids.

This festival features a kick-off party Friday night and follows that up with seminars, workshops, and, of course, a host of Michigan-centric films mingled throughout the two-day event.

For more information on the Michigan Film Festival, visit the website at www.michiganfilmfest.org.



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Hot Off the Wire



Michigan Film Community to Hold Rally

“Film Incentives Benefit Everyone” is the Theme

August 18, 2009 9 AM Michigan State Capitol, East Steps Lansing Michigan

What do Jeff Daniels and Mitch Albom have in common? They both support the Michigan Film Incentive program. As a result, more than 40 movies have either been shot in part of in their entirety in Michigan, bringing millions of dollars to Michigan businesses and people.

These tax incentives have benefited everyone in the state by encouraging film making here. From the local party store, to the vehicle rental facilities; caterers to hotels and motels, furniture rental and auto dealers, everyone benefits from these incentives. This influx is largely in out-of-state dollars. They are a growth industry and provide much needed income to Michigan citizens and state coffers.

Michigan has suffered more than any other state in this global economic meltdown and without these tax incentives, much of this new movie business WILL go elsewhere.

“There is a movement on the part of some state legislators to ‘cap’ these incentives or eliminate them completely,”

says local film maker, Mark Adler of Novi, Director of the Michigan Production Alliance. “MPA is a not-for-profit organization which was started long before the incentives were enacted.”

“MPA is sponsoring a rally to remind legislators of the importance these tax incentives provide to our community, to all the citizens of Michigan and to eroding state revenues. If the incentives go away, so does the business and 42% of zero is still zero. We need these incentives to rekindle the motion picture business in Michigan.”

More than 40 years ago, more film production was done in Michigan than in Hollywood. That business went to states that enacted tax incentives. The Michigan legislature saw the wisdom in enacting these tax rebates (which are paid back only after verification and at the end of the fiscal year) to stimulate the business in April, 2008.

The Michigan Film Incentive has been responsible for growing income from \$2 million to around \$125 million last year, in the worst economic downturn the state has experienced since the Great Depression. The incentives give new hope to the state in the form of new revenue streams and new hope for workers who have lost their jobs and may lose their homes.

As the voice of the production community, the MPA is calling on all interested people to come to Lansing to support these tax incentives that bring much needed dollars to Michigan. It’s an investment in the future and in a new creative GREEN economy.

Bits 'n Pieces

Two great bits of information came to us and we thought we'd share them with all of you.



First, WMFVA member Rich Brauer was honored as "Michigan Filmmaker of the Year" at the Traverse City Film Festival. Brauer's film, "Mr. Art Critic," will be screened outdoors at the Grand Rapids Art Museum at

the Michigan Film Festival on Friday, August 28. He will also conduct a lecture at 7:00pm with the screening following his lecture.

Second, our own Membership Committee Chair and WMFVA board member Dirk Eichhorst will be teaching "Introduction to Script and Screenwriting" at Grand Rapids Community College this fall.

The class will run Tuesday evenings starting September 4 and will be a 9-week course designed to "develop student's skills as a screenwriter in this comprehensive introduction to the principles of writing for feature films." The class is a non-credit course and is open for enrollment.

For more information on the course, go to https://learning.grcc.edu/ec2k/CourseListing.asp?master_id=443&master_version=1&course_a rea=CEFP&course_number=105&course_subtitle=00



Four Wall

Wednesday, August 26, 2009, Doors open at 6:30pm. Show starts at 7pm.

Are you looking for a monthly WMFVA meeting where you can show off your work, network and just get together with the production community in general?

Every Fourth Wednesday of the month all year long WMFVA members can screen their completed and works-in-progress for FREE at the Wealthy Theatre Koning Micro-Cinema.

Constructive feedback from peers and public in attendance are offered to the filmmaker on request. Screening and attendance is FREE to all WMFVA members. Contact Tom Norton at Tom@wmfva.org for questions and programming.

Location: W@W=Wednesday at the Wealthy
Wealthy Theatre Koning Micro-Cinema
1130 Wealthy SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

FREE to WMFVA Members
\$5 to public

FEATURED VENDOR OF THE MONTH!

WMFVA members are entitled to special discounts from select vendors, both local and national, who specialize in filmmaking products and services! These discounts are available to WMFVA members all year. Each month, we highlight one of them.

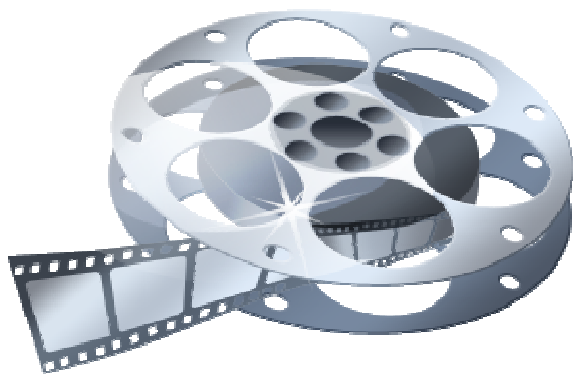
This month's featured vendor is THEATRICKS! Costume rentals, technical supplies, ROSCO products, blank guns, swords, pyrotechnics, make-up, special effects!

10% DISCOUNT OFF THE PRICE OF ONE DAY COSTUME RENTALS (pick up one day, return the following day) – OR – GET ONE EXTRA DAY FREE ON YOUR COSTUME RENTALS (must be consecutive days).

Theatricks is open Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm and Saturdays from Labor Day to Memorial Day. For more details, call THEATRICKS at 616-363-4259. Located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2136 Plainfield Ave., NE Grand Rapids, MI 49505.

Please note: Discount is available only to WMFVA members. You must show your WMFVA Member Card upon pickup to get the discount. (if you are already a WMFVA member, look for your card soon in your postal mailbox). Please visit www.wmfva.org for more information on becoming a member!

If you have further questions about this discount, please email the new WMFVA Vendor Discount Coordinator, Liz Merriman, at vendorcoordinator@wmfva.org.



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Dirk Eichhorst is a script & screenwriter with over twenty years experience in more than 120 film & video projects. Credits include THE SCRIPTORIUM (a 2-hour documentary on ancient Bibles), BODY BALANCING BY TOM KOCHMALS (a 6-part fitness DVD series), IF IT IS TO BE (a feature-length screenplay adaptation), and HEROES ADRIFT (a Star Wars short feature). Dirk is an Accolade Award Winner, writer-director-editor of two independent features, and a writing & directing teacher.



A Word From Our Chair...

Michigan's Film Incentives Face Tough Challenges

by Deb Havens, Chair, and Andy Johnston, Legislative Liaison, WMFVA Board of Directors

The Michigan Motion Picture Production Industry Credit is in an unusual position.

The program has been dubbed the most successful incentive in the history of the state, bringing in \$65 million dollars in direct spending in just 9 months thanks to 32 films that completed production in 2008. Four production studios are opening in Pontiac, Plymouth, Allen Park and Detroit, promising permanent jobs and training programs to build the film industry talent pool. Over 40 films are in production currently, with projected spending by filmmakers pegged at \$187.7 million by 2012.¹ The film incentives program enjoys support from 70% of Michigan residents.

At the same time, the Michigan Legislature could wipe out the incentives. Former Representative Bill Huizenga, who introduced the film incentives legislation and shepherded the package through both the House and Senate to near unanimous support, admits he is "very nervous" about the future of the program. The \$1.8 billion state budget deficit and the state's economic crisis are fueling

efforts to cap or even cut the incentive program. Huizenga and many other legislative supporters of the incentives are no longer in office due to term-limits.

The program cost the state \$48 million in rebates to producers for production in 2008, which incentive opponents contend the state cannot afford. There is no doubt that the state is in economic and employment crisis with the highest unemployment rate in the nation.

Senator Nancy Cassis (R-Novi), Chair of the Senate Finance Committee is no fan of the program and was the lone "no" vote when the incentives were passed. Her committee has focused on testimony that concentrates on the cost of the program, barely a year old as of April.

In fact, witnesses such as Senate Fiscal Agency economist David Zin tend to inflate the costs, claiming that the incentives rebates could total \$100 – \$148 million in 2009. Michigan Film Office Director Janet Lockwood stated she "had no idea" where that figure could come from based on the budgets of the productions currently approved for rebates.

The incentives will not cost "the state" more money than they will bring in. This is criticism we are likely to hear from the Department of Treasury or the Senate and House Fiscal Agencies. The job of these organizations is to watch the money in the state coffers. Their reports are estimates from the Treasury on how the 40-42% film rebates will impact the budget, even though few, if any, films qualify for the full rebate possible.

As the production community we need to combat this effort by advocating for the

A Word From Our Chair (con't)

incentives and showing they are creating jobs. We need to stress that for a production company to be eligible for the rebate, they must spend their dollars in Michigan with Michigan vendors.

All production costs must all be paid and the project completed, before a check is cut from the State of Michigan. Before a project can hope to qualify for the incentives, the total sum of its budget must be spent in Michigan first, excluding exceptions for above-the-line talent hires. Required insurance, legal advice, and/or duct tape, it must be purchased from a Michigan company.

This money is, has, and will be spent on Michigan businesses, helping to create and keep jobs here, and the program is working. These dollars are circulating where they should be, in the economy, our pockets, and local cash registers rather than sitting in the state's bank account. Further, the Department of Treasury has acknowledged it cannot even calculate all the economic benefits from the incentives!

The film incentives will not be the saving grace for Michigan's economic woes, but it is bringing millions of dollars in investment and jobs. A bright spot at a time we sorely need it. The secondary effects of the program are countless, from the increased economic activity to the buzz about the state around the nation.

Legislators need to hear from you - share your story!

There will be a rally in Lansing on August 18 organized by the Michigan Production Alliance to support the film incentives. If you value the incentives, please check out the article in this newsletter for details and be there on August 18. Also, Michigan Film Office Communications Director Ken Droz is seeking your success stories, or if you know of one to refer. Send your info to: mfo@michigan.org.

Deb Havens, Chair & Andy Johnston,
Legislative Liaison
WMFVA Board of Directors

1. *Miller, Steven & Abdul, Abdulkadri, (February 6, 2009), The Economic Impact of Michigan's Motion Picture Production Industry and the Michigan Motion Picture Production Credit, Center for Economic Analysis, Michigan State University.*
2. *Cassis, Senator Nancy (April 30, 2009) Senate Finance Tax Committee hearing, Lansing, Michigan.*

