

County film commissioner: production crews favor Canada

7/16/2006

by Wendy Butler,

The television series bears the title "Eureka," but it wasn't filmed here or even in Humboldt County.

Sci Fi Channel will debut the original production on Tuesday at 9 p.m.

It is directed by Peter O'Fallon and co-written by Andrew Cosby and Jaime Paglia.

It was filmed in Canada.

Humboldt County Film Commissioner Barbara Bryant said that she discovered this series several months ago, when her office was scouting for upcoming productions and also when she received a phone inquiry about it from the North Coast Journal.

Since then Bryant has been thinking about ways to connect this area with the series' producers.

"We would like to see if there was something we could have filmed here, but the story was written to be filmed in Canada," Bryant said during an interview on Friday. "How could we market Eureka, the county, as this particular series goes forward?"

The series' promotional text reads: "Nestled in the Pacific Northwest, Eureka is a seemingly ordinary town whose residents lead ordinary lives ... at least to the naked eye. Shrouded in secrecy, the picturesque hamlet is actually a community of scientific geniuses assembled by the government to conduct top-secret research."

Bryant said she will watch the pilot episode on Tuesday and decide what to do from there.

She said that she suspects the main reason that the series was filmed in Canada is because that country has filmmaking incentives.

Twenty states in the United States have various incentives, from income tax credits to rebates of various kinds.

California has no film incentives, she said.

"One out of four major feature films are actually shot in this state," Bryant said.

Film production credits are rewards to companies for utilizing local areas, which also means local talent and production personnel are often used, Bryant said.

In 2002-2003, under Gov. Gray Davis, California had an incentive program titled "Film California First," which ranged from providing some locations free to up to \$333,000 in rebates.

Bryant said an Assembly Bill is traveling through various legislative bodies and it could re-introduce filming incentives to the state.

AB 777, sponsored by Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez (D-Los Angeles), proposes a 12 percent tax credit on production wages paid in California.

Bryant said an example of her frustration at the state having no program in place is of a recent small film. It was written about this area and the crew wants to film here, but investors are telling it to go to Canada.

Bryant said the film is by a former Humboldt County resident and the production company is made up of people from New York and San Francisco.

She said she is attempting to land that company for this area, but it comes down to their budget.

Another troubling example, Bryant said, is that a little more than a year ago a Jedediah Smith television documentary for the Discovery Channel wasn't filmed here. It was filmed in New Mexico, which has state-sponsored film incentives.

What does Humboldt County have to offer if not a huge rebate?

"Basically as a rural community we have a lot of costs that are frankly less expensive (and) because we have such a diverse set of locations, you can do a lot of filming here without moving to other sites," Bryant said.

She said it is important for people to understand that it isn't just about Hollywood filming in Humboldt County.

"I'd like to point out that they might see the names come up here for filming, but these films hire local people for filming," she said. "People also get experience that they wouldn't have had."

But it is an industry and there are substantial credits offered in places other than California, Bryant said.