

Indie Films Flourish in Southern Oregon, But That's Not All

BY GARY KOUT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
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There are many ways to measure a banner year. For the years 2005 through 2008, Southern Oregon was able to measure it by the presence of one medium-sized film production a year, starting with *Conversations with God* in 2005, continuing with *My Name is Bruce* in 2006, and ending with *Calvin Marshall* in the winter of 2007/2008. Together, the budgets totaled over \$6 million, with an estimated \$2.5 million spent in the Southern Oregon region.

The rest of 2008 was very quiet in the region, as the declining housing market and rising bank credit problems dried up a lot of capital that might otherwise have been invested in independent feature films. The beginning of 2009 was

even worse, and it seemed it might be another quiet year for Southern Oregon production.

But once the realities of the new economy set in, everyone seemed to collectively figure out a way around the problem and they all dug in deep and learned to deal with it. Towards the latter half of the year, independent production exploded in Southern Oregon.

The first project to get off the ground was *Letters from the Big Man* by the critically acclaimed filmmaker Christopher Munch. His unique script about a woman who encounters a mysterious force in the forests of Southern Oregon began filming in late September.

The second feature-length project to shoot was the sophomore effort from Nathaniel Bennet, a young indie filmmaker

with tremendous talent. Bennet used the RED camera and a local cast and crew for his film.

Prolific filmmaker Ray Robison, director of numerous locally-made features and shorts, also rolled cameras on his latest short film, entitled *The Bag*.

The year ended with the low-budget horror film *Rogue River*, which set up camp in the small town of Merlin, just outside of Grants Pass. The film shot in limited locations with a small cast and crew, many of whom came up from California. However, the producers soon realized they could turn to the local crew base to fill out some departments.

In addition to the feature films produced in the area, countless corporate-funded commercial and TV projects went on throughout the year. For example, Screaming Flea Productions out of Seattle

came to Southern Oregon to film parts of a History Channel show, National Geographic shot a piece on Bigfoot, Steelhead Advertising continued its work for LG, and the list goes on and on.

The lesson learned is that it doesn't take one big production to make the Southern Oregon region stand out. Instead, it's the numerous high-quality productions at all levels that propel the local industry forward, keeping the crews and vendors busy, the talent honed, and the film industry an important part of the Southern Oregon economy.

To learn how your next production can benefit from all the advantages of filming in the region, contact Southern Oregon Film and Television (SOFaT) for information and free and friendly support. Visit www.filmsouthernoregon.org.

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