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Tallahassee region could attract more filmmakers, promoters say

By Will Brown
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Downtown Tallahassee has been buzzing the past week as producers, actors and others are in town filming an HBO movie.

Chucha Barber is working to ensure the area's fixation with the movie industry does not fade once filming is completed today. Barber's company, Tight Shots & Sounds, was contracted by the Tallahassee Area Convention & Visitors Bureau to make a high-definition DVD as a promotional piece to attract other production projects to the area.

Tuesday her company spent the day filming the people who were filming "Recount" for her DVD.

"The idea is to demonstrate to the recipients of this DVD that Tallahassee and the surrounding communities are a great place to come and create productions," Barber said.

HBO brought an estimated 140 people and hired almost 1,000 extras for the movie. The visitors alone could have an estimated daily economic impact of \$18,620, based on tourism research from Florida State University.

Michael Wright has worked to attract filmmakers for almost 20 years. Wright is Tallahassee's assistant city manager for development and transportation, and he credits former president Bill Clinton for alerting him to the economic potential of the movie industry. Wright was city manager of Hot Springs, Ark., in the 1980s while Clinton was governor.

"He's the one who said 'Look, here is the economic impact. They spend a lot of money. They bring a lot of people. They spend a lot of hotel nights,'" Wright said. "People don't realize how much activity has to go on by so many people just to film a few seconds."

Wright estimated he has worked with television or film producers more than a dozen times while city manager in Hot Springs and Clearwater, Fla.

"Movie guys want to be able to come in and do their business," Wright said. "What we try to do is help them make it as seamless as possible. They aren't afraid to pay for services. These guys paid the extra police protection to move the FAMU (Homecoming) parade to Monroe Street."

Barber said there is no limit to how far the film industry could progress in the Big Bend because this area can provide coastal and wilderness shots within a half-day of work.

FAMU graduates Will Packer and Rob Hardy shot their first film in Tallahassee while the two were students. Their company, Rainforest Films, has produced “Stomp the Yard” and a half-dozen other films.

“Tallahassee at that time, and (today remains) a film-friendly community. It’s not a jaded market. At that time, when we told people what we were trying to do, people (in the community) actually cared. You don’t get that in New York or Los Angeles, where there is apathy when it comes to film production,” Packer said, noting that Tallahassee would be a great city to shoot a project that focuses on students or politics.

Barber said every community forms a personality from its leadership and natural resources.

“The truth is, like it or not, this community is going to grow and change,” Barber said. “It’s the responsibility of those who live here to promote that change in a manner we will all be proud of in the future. Film and related production industries are just one piece of the puzzle.”

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