



# NANA gets into showbiz

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Alaska is jumping on the movie business bandwagon, and Native corporation NANA is hoping to help lead the charge.

The company announced that it's invested "several million" to purchase 33 percent ownership of Evergreen Films, a high-tech Alaska production house with studios in Anchorage and Hollywood.

"Frankly this is a pretty exciting field," said Helvi Sandvik, president of NANA Development of NANA Regional Corp.

Sandvik said Evergreen approached NANA Development about a year ago with a proposal and business model. NANA has several subsidiaries that look likely to benefit from the partnership, including those that pump money into local businesses - from hair salons to construction companies - it also creates jobs for young professionals who would otherwise have to leave state to work in that industry.

Sandvik said that she also hopes NANA Development's stake in the film industry will open up an exciting new career field for shareholders.

"Really the sky is the limit. Sometimes it's a matter of helping people visualize what those opportunities may hold," Sandvik said.

## Building a movie pipeline

NANA's announcement came just days before filming in Anchorage began on "Everybody Loves Whales," a movie starring Drew Barrymore and John Krasinski (star of "License to Wed" and the TV show "The Office"). The film is based on the true story of three grey whales stranded in the sea ice off Point Barrow in 1988.

"Loves Whales" is the first high-profile movie to come out of the tax incentive program introduced by Sen. Johnny Ellis in 2008. Senate bill 230 rebuilt the Alaska Film Office and created a program that offers tax credit to movies, documentaries, commercials, and video projects that spend at least \$100,000 in Alaska.

Stories about Alaska have long attracted filmmakers and movie-goers, in large part because of the state's spectacular and risk-filled landscapes. But before the incentive program, the vast majority of movies about Alaska were filmed far away.

Recent thrillers "30 days of Night" and "The Fourth Kind," were set in Barrow and Nome but filmed in New Zealand and Bulgaria, respectively. The 2009 blockbuster "The Proposal," starring Sandra Bullock, was set in Sitka but filmed in Massachusetts.

That means the state is losing out on a lot of money that could be going to Alaskans, said Carolyn Robinson, owner and executive producer at Sprocketheads LLC, an Anchorage-based film company.

A major production like "The Proposal" spends, on average, about \$100,000 a day, Robinson said. Not only does that pump money into local businesses - from hair salons to construction companies - it also creates jobs for young professionals who would otherwise have to leave state to work in that industry.

"Think of this can of movie film as a barrel of oil," Robinson said, waving a reel at a recent meeting of Anchorage businesses. "We can build a new kind of pipeline."

Robinson said we'll be seeing more movies - and moolah - coming down the pipeline soon. An movie executive and an "international team" were scouting locations for another big film earlier this year. The trip included a dog sled ride at Iditarod champion Martin Buser's kennel. Details are still under wraps, Robinson said, but discussions are underway with leading men Viggo Mortensen, Liam Neeson and Jeff Bridges.

Pre-production might begin as early as this fall, and filming in early 2011. But that's not because of the scenery or any dog sled ride, Robinson said. In the end it's all due to the incentive program.

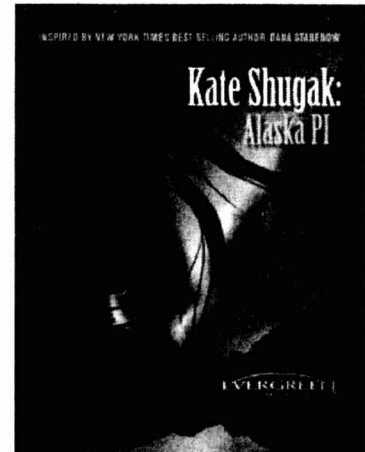
"The film executive told me flat out that they did a multi-country, multi-state comparison. And calculating in our film incentive program, the bottom line was - shoot in Alaska."

That was the same bottom line that decided the NANA board to invest, said a very un-star-struck sounding Sandvik.

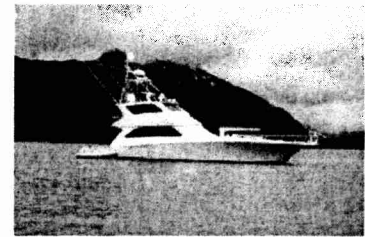
"We're very analytical in everything we do. NANA has an incredible number of opportunities that are presented to us today. This was no different than any of the rest of those," Sandvik said.

## New Hollywood North

Anchorage will never be Hollywood - and most Alaskans would agree, that's a good thing. But Mike Devlin, one of the founders of Evergreen Films, said Alaska might look instead to Vancouver as a portent of what's to come if all goes well.



NANA Development has invested "several million" into minority ownership of Evergreen Films, an Alaska production house that is creating a TV series based on Dana Stabenow's popular series about a Native woman detective. (Courtesy Photo, Evergreen Films)



Evergreen is a production house seeking to rival high-tech production houses. Part of its outfit is the Strider, a Viking 74 Sport Fisher with mounted and underwater cameras. (Courtesy Photo, Evergreen Films)

Since "The X-Files" began filming in Vancouver in the early '90s, the Canadian city has built up the infrastructure to pull in over a billion dollars a year (British Columbia has sometimes been the stand-in for Alaska in the movies). The number of productions taking place there has earned it the nickname "Hollywood North."

Alaska still has a long way to go until it can rival that kind of success. It still lacks the things that are critical to the film industry, such as a CGI shop, trained personnel and sound stages (Robinson said Anchorage needs at least four).

Also, Alaskans would have to get used to how Hollywood works - fast. And with "a high level of customer service," Robinson said.

NANA's investment in Evergreen Films means they'll participate in building up that capacity. Evergreen is a high-tech studio that specializes in digital 3-D technology. The company is partnering with BBC Earth to produce "Dinosaurs 3-D" and released a few 3-D concert videos for bands including Phish and Dave Matthews.

"We can do Avatar class films, and we can do them for a much lower budget and we can them here in Alaska, which is very different than the way the world was 10 years ago," Devlin said.

Evergreen also films for television. The company has optioned Dana Stabenow's best-selling Kate Shugak mystery novels. The books' heroine is an Aleut woman who solves crimes on the last frontier with help from her Mutt, her half-wolf, half-dog partner.

But whether it's for big or small screen, Devlin said that the more Alaska can encourage high-quality, scripted shows, the more the state will reap the benefit of its inherent charisma for movie-goers.

"This will not be a short job. It'll be a 10-year job to build this industry. But it'll be a lot of fun," Devlin said.

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