

Film credit helping to pull in \$1B in revenue

Georgia's film program is on track to surpass the \$1 billion it brought to the state in 2010.

A Denzel Washington film will start shooting in Atlanta in October, marking the next big-budget project to come to the state.

The film is run by Paramount Pictures and directed by Robert Zemeckis, who won an Academy Award for "Forrest Gump."

It's called "Flight," about a commercial airline pilot who saves 98 lives when he safely lands a damaged plane.

Film directors are drawn to Georgia in part because of the tax credit program in place, said Peter Stathopoulos, shareholder at Atlanta accounting firm Bennett Thrasher P.C.

"It's attracted a large amount of investment in the state," he said.

The credits work like this: filmmakers who agree to do a project here register with the Department of Economic Development. Once a project has spent \$500,000 in the state, it qualifies for the credit.

The credit will cover up to 30 percent of the expenditures of making a movie, television show or commercial here.

"If you make your movie in Georgia versus a state that doesn't have an incentive, it's 30 percent cheaper," Stathopoulos said. "That's a compelling reason to make your movie here."

Before the program, the state's production economy sat at around \$30 million, and most of that came from Turner Broadcasting System Inc., he said.

In 2010, \$1 billion was spent on movie projects in the state, including the television shows "Walking Dead" and "Vampire Diaries" and the recently released feature films "Contagion" and "The Change-Up."

And there's a secondary market for the incentives.

If a film production doesn't have any tax liability, it can't use the credits to offset that tax, rendering it useless.

Instead, it can sell the credits to individuals or companies who do have income tax liability.

The market for the credits usually runs at 80 cents or 90 cents on the dollar, meaning a person owing a large amount of income tax can buy the credits at a discount, rather than paying the tax in full.

"They're really versatile," Stathopoulos said of the credits. "It's an easy way to monetize the credits and it defrays part of the capital raise for the film," he said



New Ernst & Young Report Shows Positive ROI from Michigan's Fast Growing Film and Television Industry

State's Top Convention & Visitors Bureaus Commissioned the [Study](#) in Late 2010

(Detroit, February 21, 2011) A new research study conducted by respected international accounting firm Ernst & Young- commissioned by the Convention & Visitors Bureaus for metro Detroit, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor and Traverse City- already shows a positive Return on Investment (ROI) from Michigan's film production tax credit, despite the fact that the program has been in place for less than three full years.

"When we hired Ernst & Young's Washington, DC office to look into the real financial picture behind Michigan's film production credit, we weren't sure what the report would show", said Larry Alexander, President & CEO of the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau. "When the final report was presented to us last week, we were delighted to learn that this fast growing new industry had already created 3,860 full time equivalent jobs for Michigan residents in 2010, at an average salary of \$53,700 per year, and generated an estimated impact on statewide sales of \$503 million in 2010 alone... or \$5.94 per dollar of net credit cost."

The report looked at the net cost of the film, TV and digital gaming production credit by subtracting the estimated new taxes, fees and reduction in unemployment insurance benefits experienced by the state of Michigan from the earned credits in 2009 and 2010, producing a figure of \$52.5 million in 2009 and \$84.7 million in 2010.

"Diversifying Michigan's economy by investing \$84.7 million- and generating over a half a billion dollars of economic activity and nearly 4,000 high paying jobs- sounds like a pretty good deal to us", according to Alexander.

[Click here](#) to read the Michigan Film Incentive Study.



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U.S. Department of the Interior

NPS Alaska Region
240 W. 5th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501

907-644-3512 phone

Alaska National Parks News Release

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Alaska's National Park Visitation Up in 2011

Preliminary counts show that 2011 brought a modest increase in visitation to Alaska's national parks.

The Alaska Region saw about 2.32 million recreational visits over the past 12 months, up 50,000 (or about 2 percent) from the 2.27 million in 2010. Final numbers for this calendar year will be available in the spring.

Kenai Fjords National Park, headquartered in Seward, and Denali National Park had the largest increases for 2011. Those two parks, along with Glacier Bay, Klondike Gold Rush and Sitka national parks, account for more than 2.17 million visits, or about 90 percent of visits to all NPS units in the state. Visitation to those parks, particularly the three in Southeast Alaska, is closely tied to the number of cruise ship passengers.

Alaska's national parks are open all year, although visitation patterns at this time of year generally change to skiing, dog mushing and similar pursuits.

At Kenai Fjords NP, the Exit Glacier area is a popular destination in winter. Snowmachines may be used in certain areas and a public use cabin is available. Information on the area is available at <http://www.nps.gov/kefi/planyourvisit/winter-activities.htm>

At Denali NP, the Murie Science and Learning Center serves as the winter visitor center. Skiers and dog mushers often use the park road corridor to access the interior of the park, and snowmachine use for traditional activities is allowed in certain areas. Further information on all activities is available at <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/winter-activities.htm> Denali also helps host Winterfest, a three-day festival on February 24-6, 2012: <http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/winterfest.htm>)

Visitation to Alaska's national parks over the past 10 years has ranged from a low of 2.15 million in 2002 to a high of 2.63 million in 2007. A database showing visitation to all of America's national parks is available at <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/index.cfm>

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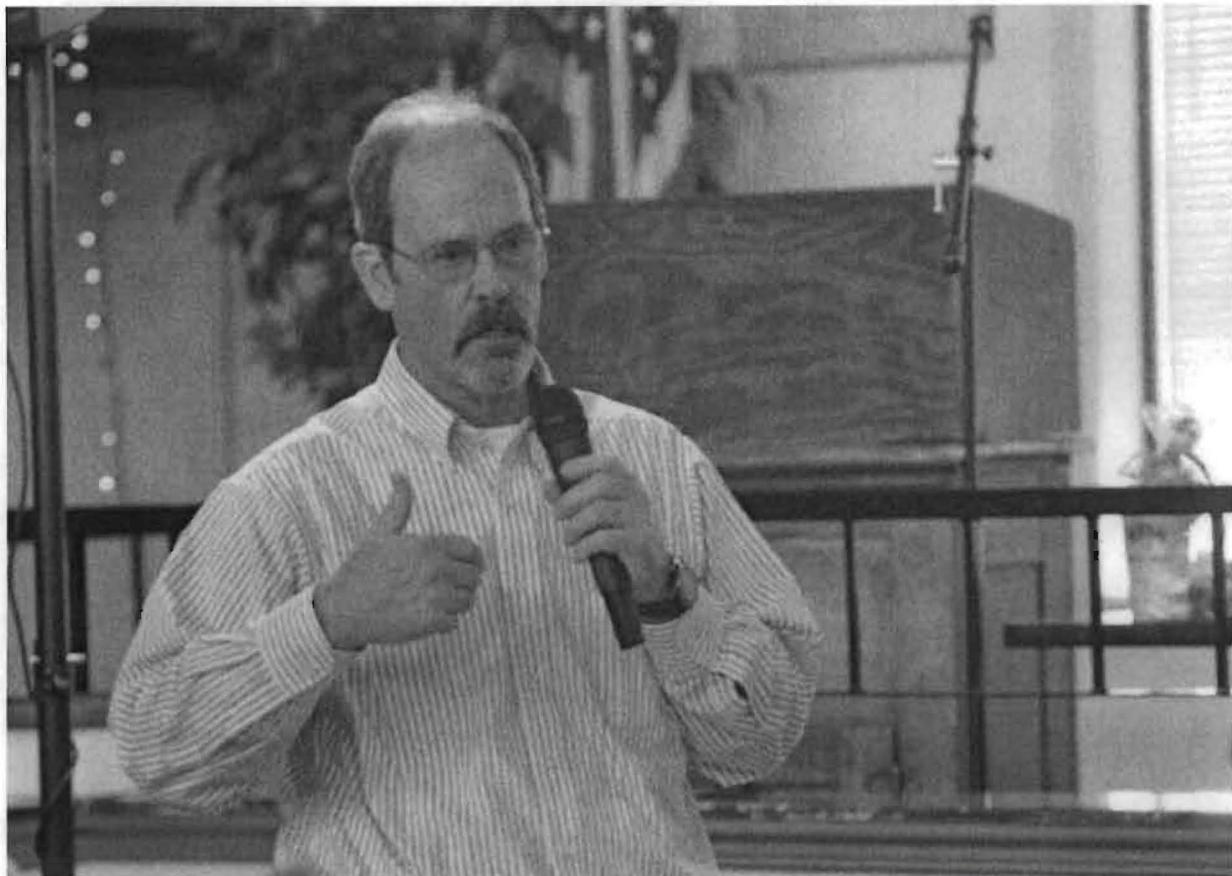
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Feb 2, 2012 - 10:47 AM AKST

Production company favors film incentives

Duo addresses chamber about extending program

BY MIKE NESPER, CHUGIAK-EAGLE RIVER STAR



Bob Crockett, general manager of Piksik, LLC, answers questions following a presentation about Alaska film incentives to the Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 18.

STAR PHOTO BY MIKE NESPER

The Alaska filming of the upcoming Hollywood film "Big Miracle" included \$7.7 million in spending on goods and services with 80 different businesses throughout the state, according to Bob Crockett and Deborah Schildt, who want to see Alaska continue to benefit from film industry revenue.

Crockett, the general manager of Anchorage-based production company Piiksik LLC, and Schildt, Piiksik's production manager, addressed the Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 18 to promote the extension of film production incentives in Alaska.

The duo wants a 10-year extension of the tax credits offered in Senate Bill 23.

The Alaska Film Incentive Program has been in place for three years. The program offers up to 44 percent in transferable tax credits.

Those include a 30 percent base tax credit on spending in Alaska, plus an additional 10 percent for hiring Alaskans, 2 percent for shooting in rural areas and 2 percent for working during off-season months (October to March), according to a sponsor statement by Sen. Johnny Ellis. (Read Ellis' entire statement at <http://aksenate.org/index.php?bill=SB23>).

The program ends after five years or \$100 million in tax credits have been given out, according to Ellis' statement.

Since 2009, the state has issued \$13 million in film tax credits, according to Crockett and Schildt.

Locals also reaped the benefits of having "Big Miracle" filmed in Alaska.

The movie — about rescuing grey whales trapped by ice — featured more than 80 Eagle River residents as extras, Schildt said. Many more behind-the-scenes employees were hired from all around the state, she said.

"We cast on this picture from Barrow to Bethel," Schildt said.

More than 1,300 Alaskans earned paychecks related to the film, Crockett said.

Producers flock to states with the best deals, Crockett said, so it's important for Alaska to continue its incentive program.

"We cast on this picture from Barrow to Bethel," Schildt said.

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Shooting movies in Alaska also boosts the local economy, Schildt said.

"Film incentives help Alaskan businesses," she said.

Those interested in purchasing film production tax credits can visit www.film.alaska.gov for more information.

Crockett and Schildt concluded their presentation with a video message from Oscar-winning actor Jon Voight.

In his message, Voight praised Alaskans' worth ethic and flexibility on the job.

"These people are full of energy, not spoiled, cheerful," he said.

Voight said living through harsh winters molds Alaskans into caring individuals.

"People have to help each other out," he said. "It builds character."

Contact Mike Nesper at 694-2727 or mike.nesper@alaskastar.com

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PENINSULA CLARION



Big Screen Debut

Kenai woman's film career begins, ends

Posted: January 16, 2012 - 9:40pm



Photo by M. Scott Moon

Maliaq Kairaiuak has a role in "Big Miracle," the movie about whales trapped in the Arctic Ocean.

By Jerzy Shedlock

Peninsula Clarion

What started as a joke morphed into a small acting part in the upcoming film "Big Miracle," previously titled "Everybody Loves Whales."

Maliaq Kairaiuak and her sister, Roxy Madison, both sent pictures with half-hearted hopes of landing the role of an Anchorage waitress in the film. To the Kenai resident's surprise, the movie's executives scheduled auditions for them.

"It was an excuse to go to Anchorage for the day," she said with a laugh. "I didn't think I was actually going to get (the role)."

The waitress had a couple lines, and Kairaiuak shared the same dressing room as the film's big-name stars.

The film is based on the events surrounding three California gray whales trapped by ice in Barrow during their winter migration in 1988 and a romance that ensues between a Greenpeace International activist, played by Drew Barrymore, and small-town news reporter covering the events, played by John Krasinski.

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The movie was filmed in Anchorage with some scenes in Barrow in part because of the state's film production incentive program, which offers up to 44 percent in transferable tax credits on qualified production expenditures.

Kairaiuak said she was surprised to receive the call for an audition — it seemed like a prank.

"I thought it was one of my friends calling me," she said.

The appointment-only auditions took place at the Dimond Center shopping mall in Anchorage. Kairaiuak recalls six other girls who were auditioning all week for the same small part. She performed three different scenes and had her picture taken, leaving the audition with little worry as to her future movie career.

But perhaps her calm demeanor toward the audition was a factor in landing the role.

"When I was working on the film (the director and crew) said I was actually pretty good, and I should audition for more roles," she said.

As quickly as movies premier and disappear, Kairaiuak was on her way to Anchorage. The production company paid for the flight, as well as a hotel room.

Filming took three days at Mexico in Alaska, a restaurant in Anchorage.

The scenes required a lot of repetitive steps, which was taxing on Kairaiuak. She wears glasses but was barred from donning her modern frames. She said she walked around nearly blind most days.

However, bright markings directed her actions during the scenes.

"You had to be precise about everything," she said. "You had to stop, make movements in the same place every time. It was a long process."

Waking at 6 a.m., Kairaiuak said she worked a varying shift. One day of filming lasted 13 hours.

Her outfit consisted of little more than a t-shirt with the word "Amigos." Being an '80s movie, the details were in the hair.

"I had fanned-out bangs and a scrunchy in my hair," she said. "I looked a little ridiculous."

PENINSULA CLARION

Hair and makeup was every morning. This was when Kairaiuak had a chance to strike up small talk with Barrymore, Krasinski, Ted Danson or John Michael Higgins. They were normal, nice people who shared little personal details unless asked specific questions, she said.

"I didn't really ask them personal questions or stuff about movies they've been in," Kairaiuak said. "I didn't want to seem star struck ... I asked them if they liked Alaska and they all said they did."

Her first encounter with actress Kristine Bell was memorable, but not for the usual reasons. Kairaiuak said she was exhausted, chatting with another actress on her first morning. The actress was Bell.

"We finished talking and I got up and walked away," she said. "I didn't even know it was her."

A special screening is set for "Big Miracle" on Jan 29 in Anchorage. Kairaiuak will attend with company. She said she thinks it will be weird to see herself on the big screen, mainly because she never expected to act in a Hollywood movie.

Her future plans don't include acting. She recently graduated from AVTEC and began working at Cottonwood Health Center.

"It was cool and I got to meet a lot of people," she said. "I'm not really interested in doing it again. It was a one-time thing. I did it for the experience."

A full release of the film is scheduled for Feb. 3.

Jerzy Shedlock can be reached at jerzy.shedlock@peninsulaclarion.com.

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a movie star

By [northernlights](#) | 01/17/12 - 01:27 pm

Well I am happy to say we have a movie star from here. I am excited to see the movie, will be very cool, espcialy based on a true story and having worked in barrow for several years I will appreciate it even more. Anyway, glad she got the part, very cool.

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The film incentive program is creating jobs and stimulating new business for the long haul...

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Alaska film industry develops

by Jonathan Huff/Fairbanks

Feb 03, 2012 | 1342 views | 3 2

Community Perspective

Creating new private sector jobs, economic development and unique educational opportunities — this is exactly what the growing film industry here in Alaska is doing.

My business, Alaska Universal Productions, is an example of one that can grow because of the film tax incentive initiated in 2008. However, discussion by some industry groups and a few lawmakers could unknowingly end the success and economic opportunity we see today in the movie-making business in Alaska.

There is talk by some Alaska House members of not acting on a proposed 10-year extension of the film tax incentive, as well as discussion of replacing it with direct payments to movie producers. These are bad ideas.

Here are three important facts:

- Not passing the extension in the upcoming legislative session would create fiscal uncertainty in a business that demands it.
- Direct payment to those making movies would require a yearly appropriation by the Alaska Legislature and provide no long-term commitment or fiscal certainty to producers wanting to film movies in Alaska.
- These actions would end the growth of this industry in Alaska.

We have all heard about the “Whales” film, now called “Big Miracle,” starring Drew Barrymore. It was filmed in Alaska in fall 2010, and is set for release today. According to the McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm, the film added more than \$16 million to Alaska’s economy. More than 80 businesses and 1,300 people received checks for their work on the production. I was one of them. I also worked on the film “Christmas with a Capital C,” shot in Seward. In fact, I quit my “day job” and started my own business, in part because the film industry here is growing.

I am a lighting and sound technician who earned a degree at the University of Alaska Fairbanks after working in television news in Fairbanks and Anchorage. Today, I have a thriving business looking to expand its client list. I have grown from a one-man operation to four employees. My company has purchased close to \$20,000 in film gear for use here in Fairbanks and the Interior.

However, Alaska Universal Productions is just one of a growing number of Alaska businesses now working in the film industry. The opportunities today are just scratching the surface of what they could be tomorrow. As more movies are made and with a new University of Alaska film major, work for businesses like mine will

come to Interior Alaska. It will help me buy more equipment, hire more people and use UA interns. That is good for my business, but also good for Fairbanks.

We are starting an industry from the ground up, and are just beginning to attract attention nationally and globally as a production location. Alaska has learned developing a film takes time. It is often two to five years to get a script finalized, actors signed, locations scouted and other details completed. Without a long-term commitment, producers will not film in Alaska. Without a long-term commitment, private investors who are considering building sound stages, make up trucks or catering equipment will simply not invest.

Crew training is taking place in hopes of serving new private-sector businesses in our state. Successful workforce development programs are under way, and there is almost \$500,000 available in grants from the Department of Labor to create more of them.

Still, the best way to train a local workforce is through on-the-job-training on movie sets, and that requires movies filmed in Alaska. To meet that need, our state must show a long-term commitment to the film industry to allow for the development of a stable, well-trained, local workforce. A successful industry will then provide a promising future for Alaskans who want to work behind and in front of the camera.

The film-making industry can help diversify our economy and create economic development from movies filmed in Alaska. We just have to pass a 10-year extension of the film tax incentive and be vigilant in nurturing this emerging industry's growth.

Jonathan Huff grew up in Alaska and graduated from UAF in 2005. He resides in Fairbanks with his wife, Amanda, and is owner of Alaska Universal Production.

Anchorage adn.com Daily News

January 3, 2012

State tax credits lure movies -- and money

COMPASS: Other points of view

DEBORAH SCHILDT

Commentary

This fall, I put 672 Alaskans to work in jobs they'll talk about for the rest of their lives. I did the casting for "The Frozen Ground," the second major motion picture filmed in Alaska since the state Legislature passed the film incentive program in 2008.

While most of the Alaskans I cast worked as background talent, 32 had speaking roles, earning some their Screen Actors Guild cards. Hundreds of other Alaskans provided support and technical services for the movie, which stars John Cusack and Nicolas Cage.

Film incentives really work, which is why 39 states and Puerto Rico offer them. They bring millions of new dollars into the state, create jobs and business opportunities for thousands of Alaskans and bring relief to Alaska taxpayers. Plus, completed films attract additional visitors -- as Alaska discovered after "Into the Wild" was released.

From 2008 to 2010, Alaska played a starring role in more than 44 productions valued at \$34.5 million -- and those numbers don't include the two biggies: "The Frozen Ground" and "Big Miracle," which stars Drew Barrymore and John Krasinski.

A single movie can deliver a huge wallop. The Anchorage Economic Development Corp. contracted with the McDowell Group to assess the economic impact of "Big Miracle," which was filmed in Anchorage, Barrow and Seward last year. The study identified a direct impact of \$16.5 million on the Alaska economy, a number the research firm expects to grow once Universal Studios files the documents required to obtain the film tax credit.

"Big Miracle" added \$285,000 to the Alaska economy every day it filmed. It paid \$6.2 million in income to more than 1,300 Alaskans. It purchased \$7.7 million of goods and services from 80 Alaska businesses and organizations.

Alaska uses transferable tax credits to stimulate investment and bring new business into the marketplace, including mineral exploration, certain types of oil and gas production and value-added salmon product development. Cook Inlet is a great place to see how tax credits can revitalize an economy. The new jack-up rig was brought there thanks to transferable tax credits, as is development of a gas storage infrastructure.

For the film industry, the state offers a base tax credit of 30 percent on qualified production expenditures that spend a minimum of \$100,000 in qualified expenditures. The program provides additional incentives for Alaska hire (10 percent), off-season production (2 percent) and productions filmed in rural locations (2 percent) -- for a maximum of 44 percent.

These credits are sold to companies that pay corporate income tax in Alaska. While these transactions are confidential, Icicle Seafoods has been vocal about its use of the program, telling the state Senate that it "can attest to the benefits."

Alaska's film incentive program sunsets in 2013 if it is not extended. The state Senate unanimously passed a 10-year extension of the program last session and the House is expected to take the bill up this session.

What's magic about 10 years? It gives Alaska businesses the certainty they need to make the infrastructure investments to progress the industry to the next level, including such big-ticket items as a soundstage.

We also need time to develop the expertise to provide the specialized services the film industry needs and to grow Alaska's work force on both sides of the camera.

We have only to look to Hawaii to see how a mature film industry contributes to the economy. Hawaii divides its experience into pre-"Hawaii Five-0" and post-"Hawaii Five-0." "Hawaii 5-0" allowed the state to mature its film industry, build infrastructure and develop the technical human resources it needs to fully service the industry. In 2008, nine movies and nine television shows filmed in Hawaii, bringing nearly 3,000 jobs and \$96.2 million in wages to the state. In contrast, Alaska had one movie and three television shows that year.

Alaska has everything it needs to become as bright a star as Hawaii. What we lack is the certainty -- and certainty means a firm commitment, not an annual lottery.

Deborah Schildt was Alaska casting director for "The Frozen Ground" and one of two Alaska casting directors for "Big Miracle."



Program making dreams come true

By Ben Bolea Posted: Saturday, January 21, 2012 9:50 pm

As an Alaska resident working in Hollywood, Calif., promoting a film I plan to make in Alaska this spring - quite possibly in Big Lake - the Film Tax Incentive Bill (Senate Bill 23) is a cause very close to my heart.

I graduated from South Anchorage High School in 2005 and attended New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where I earned a degree in screenwriting in 2009. After college, I moved to Los Angeles, where I have spent the last two years working on my debut feature film, "The Lower 48," a story about going to high school and being a teenager in Alaska.

SB 23 has played an immeasurable role in my story getting to the place it is today. Growing up in Alaska, I knew someday I would have to leave the home I loved to pursue my dreams of becoming a filmmaker. Film production in Alaska was nonexistent and there simply wasn't a way for me to achieve the career I wanted.

In New York City I was overwhelmed by a feeling I had never experienced before - possibility. For the first time in my life it felt like my dreams were not simply dreams, but actual goals that if I worked hard toward, I could achieve. That is what I have been doing ever since.

A few years ago I set out to tell the story I had always dreamed of telling: the story of growing up in Alaska. I co-wrote the screenplay with my best friend, another Alaskan attending NYU, and we began to show the script to everyone who would read it. No matter how many eyes passed over our script, we always received the same response - "It's a great story, but it's far too expensive to shoot a movie in Alaska."

Things continued this way until the script won an online competition and caught the eye of an independent producer in New York who agreed to take on the film. Why would someone now agree when others always declined? What was different? The Film Tax Incentive Bill had just passed. Suddenly, the impossible became possible and a lifelong dream became reality.

Last December, my producer, co-writer and I flew to Alaska to explore the locations we will use, including my home of Big Lake, and to reach out to the local professionals whose help we would need to actually make this thing happen. To be completely honest, we were not expecting much from these meetings, but I am thrilled to say we were wrong.

We found a whole community of professionals who had been working in film in Alaska any way they could for years, and because of the Film Tax Incentive Bill, they were finally being given an opportunity to use those skills in the way they'd always dreamed; to make art, to make culture, to make movies.

The Film Tax Incentive Bill is a wonderful thing.

Filmmaking technology has evolved to a place where anyone with a camera and a computer really can make a movie, but the Legislature's support is necessary for the economics to work. This program is still in its infancy and to cut it short before it was really given the time needed to grow would be a tragedy. The potential results are as vast as the great state of Alaska itself, and the immediate results are already on display in the passion, excitement and hard work of the Alaska filmmaking community. Possibility has arrived in The Last Frontier.

SB 23 means the possibilities can continue to build into the future and film production can always have a home in the state of Alaska; a place that truly has to be seen to be believed.

Ben Bolea won New York University's Venable Herndon Award for Excellence in Screenwriting. He has three screenplays currently optioned and in development with various Los Angeles and New York-based producers. His debut feature, "The Lower 48," co-written and directed with fellow Alaskan Joe Hardesty, is securing finance to be shot in Alaska this year.

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Nov 5, 2009 - 12:00 AM AKST

Opinion: Alaska must take advantage of spotlight for film, TV

BY BILL POPP

Alaska has recently taken center stage in multiple theatrical releases such as "The Proposal" and "The Fourth Kind" and in television reality shows including, "The Deadliest Catch," "The Alaska Experiment" and the recently debuted "Alaska State Troopers."

Unfortunately, the major film releases featuring Alaska had minimal impact on the state economy because they were, for the most part, filmed out-of-state with places such as Massachusetts and Canada filling in for Alaska.

And, while the reality television shows were filmed in Alaska, their budgets have a smaller impact in Alaska communities than a feature film or a scripted television series.

Fortunately, a statewide film incentive program created through legislation sponsored by Sen. Johnny Ellis has started to show promise. By encouraging filmmakers to shoot productions in Alaska, the Alaska Film Production Incentive Program promotes a diversified economy and will lead to new businesses and jobs in the state.

As shown by the recent announcement by Anchorage film company Evergreen Film, of a development deal with Alaska author Dana Stabenow for a TV series based on her Kate Shugak books, the Film Incentive Program is working as planned. It's not only supporting this new economic engine, but is actually helping it to grow.

"The Proposal" and "The Fourth kind" are only the most recent of many productions that are set in Alaska, but filmed elsewhere. "Northern Exposure" brought Alaska into the homes of millions of Americans, but the state missed out on the \$839,000 spent on the 110 episodes because the show was shot in Washington.

The popular vampire movie "30 Days of Night" was set in Barrow and produced at a cost of \$30 million, yet filmed in New Zealand. "Snow Dogs" with a \$33 million budget was lost to British Columbia.

Alaska missed out on these opportunities, in part, because until recently, Alaska was one of only a handful of states that wasn't offering incentives to the film industry. Since the creation of the Alaska program, production companies that previously showed little interest in Alaska are now starting to demonstrate a renewed interest.

Local companies and the Alaska Film Office have received multiple requests for information from producers across the nation wondering what Alaska has to offer. Enticed to Alaska by the film incentives, producers have begun to see the opportunities that Alaska's natural beauty offers and scripts are now being re-written specifically for Alaska.

All of this activity is not lost on the members of the business community who will be supplying services to the producers, cast and crews of these productions. The economic benefits from this emerging industry will filter to many sectors of the Alaska economy including professional services, transportation, hospitality and construction.

With film productions comes a boom to dry cleaning services, hotels, hardware and electrical shops, restaurants, car rentals, commercial construction and many other small businesses. And having the real Alaska portrayed on the big (and small TV) screen is sure to inspire increased tourism interest at time when it is most needed.

But our work is not done. Evergreen Films, who is also an Anchorage Economic Development Corp. investor, recently constructed a multi-million dollar post-production studio in Anchorage.

In conjunction with private investors, they are also working to identify additional property to build a sound stage, which is an important component to attracting larger film productions to our state. This is just one step towards creating infrastructure that will help make Alaska the hottest film location destination.

Alaska is again in the spotlight. Let's take advantage of it. Together we can show filmmakers from around the world our famous Alaska hospitality by welcoming them with open arms.

With the Alaska Film Production Incentive Program in place, we can further diversify our economy, continue to create high-paying private sector jobs, and attract additional investment to Alaska.

Let's make sure the next time Alaska is on the big screen, we've won the part.

Bill Popp is CEO and president of the Anchorage Economic Development Corp.

This article appears in the November 2009 issue of Alaska Journal of Commerce

Read more: <http://www.alaskajournal.com/Alaska-Journal-of-Commerce/November-2009/Opinion-Alaska-must-take-advantage-of-spotlight-for-film-TV/#ixzz1lp3C017Q>

February 6, 2012 | 4:42 pm



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Lawmakers shouldn't fall asleep on film tax credit

Posted: February 3, 2012 - 9:07am

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Another state tax credit program is due for renewal shortly and we hope lawmakers don't lose sight of it.

The state's \$100 million tax program designed to lure TV and film producers to the area is set to expire in 2013. Already a bill emerged and passed the Senate last year to extend the credit another 10 years and \$200 million. We would encourage the House to take up the issue this year.

According to reports, the program has approved a total of about \$14.3 million in tax credits for almost three dozen productions. That includes 16 reality projects and 10 feature films that spent a total of nearly \$45 million in the state since the program began running in late 2009.

That's not to mention all the benefits that come from having Alaska at the top of vacationers', investors' and business executives' minds. That kind of marketing is priceless.

And let's face it -- we like seeing ourselves and our state on screens both large and small.

Lawmakers would be foolish to not take a long look at the extension of the film credit program -- many in the industry cite it as the reason they're here. Let's keep them.

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Oct 27, 2011 - 10:24 AM AKST

Weather Channel series features Kodiak Coast Guard crews

BY JONATHAN GRASS, ALASKA JOURNAL OF COMMERCE



A U.S. Coast Guard HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter is the type regularly used for rescue missions in Kodiak. Such rescues were documented by film crews for the series "Coast Guard Alaska," set to air beginning Nov. 9.

Photo Courtesy of the Weather Channel

The U.S. Coast Guard has become such a staple of Alaska that even the Weather Channel has taken notice and will debut a television series about it. The new series "Coast Guard Alaska" will feature Coast Guard personnel stationed in Kodiak, showing viewers what it means to work at this unique station.

Season one will have seven hour-long episodes starting at 9 p.m. EST on Nov. 9. It will focus on showing what it's like to serve in active duty in this part of the world and show the magnitude of their jobs. The show will look at Alaska's unique Coast Guard life both on-duty and off.

The Weather Channel's inspiration was to use a long-form content of how the Coast Guard operates in an environment that is so influenced by the weather.

“We really want to show to people in this show the whole sort of spectrum of these individuals. So it’d be one thing to just do a show about their rescues, which would be great, but we want to do more than that,” said the Weather Channel’s vice president of content and development, Michael Dingley. “We want to make these people, these wonderful heroes if you will, relatable to you and me.”

The cameras will do this through a fly-on-the-wall presentation of daily Coast Guard life and work, and are even ready to tag along if an emergency calls.

Cameras follow the station’s personnel through their work and home life to capture what Dingley calls the four “buckets” of being in the Alaska Coast Guard. Those points, or “buckets,” consist of their rescues, training, their daily and family lives, and their motivations for joining the Coast Guard.

The reason behind displaying their biographical and family lives will be to show how these people are relatable to the audience rather than being makeshift superheroes.

“So now, as a viewer, I’m all the more connected to these people that do these wonderful things, and now I’m even more nervous of what they do because I can now totally relate to them and I’m in more even respect and awe than I would have been if it was simply a show about rescues.”

The film crew accompanied the Coast Guard on several missions of varying levels of danger. For example, the rescue of five passengers from the 60-foot vessel *Nordic Mistress* is slated to appear.

Other missions included a search and rescue for another doomed vessel that was overdue near Egegik. The film crew was not even allowed on the first search attempt but joined in the second. There were also responses to drug overdoses and a near-fatal fishing accident.

Air Station Kodiak Commanding Officer Capt. Bill Deal said a lot of the focus of the filming was on the search and rescue part. He said while this makes sense from a television perspective since it’s the most exciting part of the job, the show will go beyond the dangerous stuff.

“We have 360 people in this command so we asked them to broaden their lens’ field of view to encompass not just individuals but to look at whole picture,” said Deal.

Dingley said Alaska was an obvious location for filming such a show about the Coast Guard because of the “smorgasbord” of weather. And in this type of show, both the weather and Kodiak itself will be instrumental characters.

“Of any place else, their rescues are based on or even held hostage to the weather conditions,” he said.

The external factors there were certainly an element of attraction for the show, and they pose a very real danger to the military branch’s jobs. These are dangers that simply aren’t a factor in many other parts of the country. These men and women go deliberately into crushing storms or freezing water to save lives. Sometimes they are forced into such waters quickly without excessive protection, cutting their life expectancies to minutes in which they have to get the job done. Extreme terrain and quickly changing conditions only add to those demands.

The element of danger goes beyond immediate physical trouble. Factors like hypothermia are a very real concern for Guardsmen on the job.

“Coast Guard Alaska” will also show what life on Kodiak is like and the Coast Guardsmen will tell about their way of life in the community.

Dingley said the show has the potential to reach 90 million households, so this could definitely have an impact on Kodiak’s image.

The possibility of more Alaska locations is in the air if the show goes into a second season. Still, this prospect has yet to be determined.

Al Roker Entertainment is producing the show for the Weather Channel. However, Roker himself wasn't onsite. In fact, there will be no host or narration at all. The show is intended as a docudrama with the enlisted men and women telling the world in their own words what it means to do their jobs.

The Weather Channel could not disclose production costs, but the show has been pre-approved for the state's tax credit incentive program. The next step will be for the company to submit expense reports for those credits. This incentive was an encouragement for the production, which used local hotels, employees and rented equipment during the shoot.

"We've been spending quite a bit of money in Alaska," said Tracie Brennan, vice president of production and operations for Al Roker Entertainment.

Time will tell if Kodiak's television exposure will have any effect on its tourism.

Trevor Brown, executive director of the Kodiak Chamber of Commerce, said that the show appears to be a positive one and so has the potential to boost tourism or at least spread Kodiak's image to the rest of the country.

A representative of the Kodiak Island Convention and Visitor's Bureau was not available by press time.

Tourism may be the best option for the state to generate revenues from filming, as the Weather Channel has not licensed the show's brand for any merchandising. This has typically been the result when major networks film here. Logos for "Ice Road Truckers" and "Deadliest Catch" on shirts and merchandise are common sites in souvenir shops. Such sales may become a reality later but there are no plans at this time.

Kodiak's guardsmen still feel the show itself will have a positive impact..

"I've always thought we have one of the most fascinating jobs in the world so when we were approached by the Weather Channel and Roker to start some filming, I felt it would make sense," Deal said. "We agreed to do it because, from the Coast Guard's perspective we don't endorse any particular show but it matches out interest in letting people know what it is we do."

The last major film work featuring the Kodiak Coast Guard crew was in the 2006 movie "The Guardian," starring Kevin Costner.

Jonathan Grass can be reached at jonathan.grass@alaskajournal.com.

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ALASKA JOURNAL OF COMMERCE / AJOC-JANUARY-15 2012 / 'COAST GUARD ALASKA' RENEWED FOR TWO SEASONS

Jan 12, 2012 - 01:45 PM AKST

'Coast Guard Alaska' renewed for two seasons

BY JONATHAN GRASS, ALASKA JOURNAL OF COMMERCE



A Coast Guard Jayhawk rescue helicopter is one of the vehicles featured on the Weather Channel's "Coast Guard Alaska," which will continue filming for two additional seasons.

Courtesy photo

The series "Coast Guard Alaska" premiered on the Weather Channel in November and has already garnered at least two more seasons on the air. The show, produced by Al Roker Entertainment, follows Guardsmen from Air Station Kodiak to show what it takes to live and work in this corner of the world where extremely hazardous weather adds to both the necessity and obstacles to their rescue missions.

The second season, debuting this April, will feature five 60-minute episodes. The third will have eight and is due out in October.

So far, the show has produced a 95 percent increase in the same time period average from one year ago for viewers ages 25 through 54, according to Nielsen ratings. Viewership has increased 91 percent since the premiere episode. Roker said this has jumped to more than 100 percent in some time periods.

The Weather Channel reports it was the fifth-highest tending show on GetGlue during the premiere episode.

Roker said he thinks the realism of the show contributes to the attraction. Guardsmen go up against some crashing elements with no scripted ending. This is why Roker refers to “Coast Guard Alaska” as a documentary series rather than a reality series.

“We’re just thrilled with the access the Coast Guard has given us,” he said.

Bob Walker, the Weather Channel’s executive vice president and general manager of networks and content, said this feedback has made it clear that audiences are responding to the show, thus encouraging the demand for additional Alaska filming.

While the first season of “Coast Guard Alaska” focused on Kodiak, the producers are exploring other areas to expand the show. Kodiak was chosen as the debut location due to its extreme weather conditions that make being a rescue pilot or swimmer there among the most dangerous jobs in the world.

Some of the season was also shot in Sitka. Roker and Walker said they are looking at other future possibilities to expand the Alaska program. For now, the focus will remain on Kodiak.

“I think we’re going to go where the rescues take us. Wherever that is in Alaska,” Roker said.

Roker said having not one but two additional seasons greenlit and airing so close together was not ordinary but not unheard of.

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Walker said the show continued to grow throughout the first season’s run. This contributed to its renewal. Walker said before any show is considered for renewal, the producers must be convinced there is enough interesting content that wasn’t all covered the first time and this air station has exactly that.

“This is our first show with the Coast Guard,” he said. “We think one reason it works is it shows how the elements affect people’s lives in and around this part of Alaska.”

“The great thing about this program and what makes it, I think, special is that whether we’re there or not the Coast Guard is constantly going out doing rescues so we’re just tagging along for the ride and documenting it,” Roker said.

Roker first came up with the idea after seeing a YouTube video of local Coast Guard rescues and was impressed by the intensity of it. A phone call later and the ball started moving. He said the exciting part for him is to simultaneously show the Coast Guard’s mission and the beauty of Alaska.

“I think people are still fascinated by Alaska and we’re happy to help people get a different look at the state,” he said.

Roker said the producers will decide whether to apply for the state’s film tax incentives for these next seasons. Al Roker Entertainment pre-qualified for the incentives for the first season. No amount has been awarded yet.

“It’s clear to us that viewers are making ‘Coast Guard Alaska’ appointment viewing,” Bob Walker, executive vice president and general manager of networks and content for Weather Channel, said in a release. “Audiences have really responded to this inside look at life in Kodiak for these real-life heroes who risk their lives daily to save others. We feel privileged to offer viewers more opportunities to get to know these incredible men and women.”

Jonathan Grass can be reached at jonathan.grass@alaskajournal.com.

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Sep 22, 2011 - 11:36 AM AKST

Avatar-class 3D comes to Alaska studio

BY ANDREW JENSEN, ALASKA JOURNAL OF COMMERCE



Anchorage-based Evergreen Films has earned the first certification for 3D production from Cameron Pace Group, which was co-founded by "Avatar" director James Cameron. In collaboration with BBC Earth and Reliance Pictures, "Walking with Dinosaurs 3D" will be shot and produced in Alaska and is set for a major worldwide release in 2013.

Image/Courtesy/Evergreen Films

The biggest movie yet filmed in Alaska has gotten a boost from the biggest director in Hollywood.

"Walking with Dinosaurs 3D" producer Evergreen Films is the first studio to win certification from Cameron Pace Group for creation of 3D content and will be using the same technology from blockbusters "Avatar," "Transformers" and "Pirates of the Caribbean."

CPG was co-founded by James Cameron, the director of the two highest grossing films of all time — "Avatar" (\$2.8 billion) and "Titanic" (\$1.8 billion) — and Vince Pace, who worked with Cameron on "Titanic" and "The Abyss."

Of the 50 or so 3D films released in the last few years, CPG has contributed to about 30 that have generated some \$7.5 billion in gross box office worldwide.

Among films using CPG technology, the "Dark of the Moon" installment of the "Transformers" series grossed \$1.1 billion last summer and "On Stranger Tides" posted just more than \$1 billion for the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise.

Expectations for “Walking with Dinosaurs 3D,” set for a so-called tentpole release in 2013, are also high. Twentieth Century Fox won the bidding war for distribution at the American Film Market last November, and according to a report from industry pub Variety, sold out within a week worldwide.

The dino epic, scripted as a dramatic offering with character arcs, is a collaboration between Anchorage-based Evergreen, BBC Earth and Reliance Pictures. Variety pegged the deal as the largest ever closed by IM Global, a film financing, sales and distribution company partially owned by Reliance.

NANA Development Corp., an Alaska Native regional corporation, acquired a minority stake in Evergreen Films last year.

“‘Walking with Dinosaurs 3D’ offers us a fantastic opportunity to push our advances in 3D even further,” Cameron said in a release from BBC Worldwide. “We’re inspired by the creative ambition behind the film and the opportunity to work on a feature that brings audiences a real, visceral experience.”

Evergreen Films CEO Mike Devlin, who moved to Alaska in 2005, a couple years after selling his company, Rational Software, to IBM for \$2.1 billion, said achieving “Avatar-class” 3D has long been a goal for Evergreen.

“By partnering with Jim Cameron … we get the benefit not only of great technology, but technology developed from a filmmaker’s point of view,” Devlin said. “He’s not just doing technology for technology’s sake. He’s looking at it from the point of view of what does the filmmaker need to have artistic freedom and creative freedom to tell a story, but use 3D in a tool for telling that story.

“Jim is a big advocate of shooting the films in 3D, in using 3D in the storytelling from the very conception of the film. In ‘Walking with Dinosaurs,’ we’re very much thinking that. If it was just the dinosaurs at a distance, you wouldn’t have to worry about the 3D as much.”

The original “Walking with Dinosaurs” was a six-episode documentary series produced by BBC Earth in 1999 that won several Emmys and drew a worldwide audience of 700 million.

Variety reported the presales are expected to cover most, if not all, of the film’s \$65 million budget. That’s more than double the estimated \$30 million budget for “Big Miracle” starring Drew Barrymore filmed in Alaska that wrapped last year (originally titled “Everybody Loves Whales”).

The script is by John Collee, who wrote “Happy Feet,” which won the 2007 Oscar for best animated feature film of the year. Animal Logic of Sydney, Australia, was the animation studio for “Happy Feet” and is also building the cast for “Walking with Dinosaurs 3D.”

Filming has already begun around Southcentral near Girdwood and on the Kenai Peninsula for the live backgrounds that will provide a prehistoric setting for “Walking with Dinosaurs 3D.” Alaska isn’t just providing the scenery, either.

The film will star dinosaurs that once roamed the North Slope and wintered in Denali National Park more than 70 million years ago. All of the post-production work will also take place in Evergreen’s Anchorage studios.

Evergreen has post-production offices on Hillside, and is renovating the old Crowley building on Sandlewood Place in south Anchorage. The new headquarters for Evergreen will have a “smart” sound stage with a 50-foot by 50-foot green screen and a 24-seat studio for screenings and viewing dailies.

Sound stages and state-of-the-art post-production capability are essential infrastructure if Alaska wants to truly develop its film industry. The new Evergreen headquarters and technology will be available for any company producing a film in Alaska, and represents a new job opportunity for NANA shareholders.

“We’ll have a chance to add more permanent jobs as the industry grows,” said Robin Kornfield, vice president of communications for NANA and the president of its film services subsidiary Piksik. “We’re looking forward to having special technology here in Alaska that anyone can use. NANA is known in Alaska as a support company to oil and mining. We’re taking those capabilities and applying them to a brand new industry. We’re looking forward to providing those same services — catering, security — and opportunities for training and jobs and advancement and education that come through the film business.”

A state package of film credits passed in 2009 is up for renewal. About \$9 million of the \$100 million appropriated has been paid out, but the incentive must be approved by the state Legislature to continue after 2012.

A bill was introduced during the 2011 session and will be taken up when the Legislature convenes again next January. While none of the investments in infrastructure or technology are eligible for the credit, representatives of Evergreen including Devlin said continuing the credit is vital to the picture filming in Alaska.

The hero of the film, a pachyrhinosaurus — pronounced pak-ee-rino-sore-us, and similar to a triceratops with the frilled head but without the horned snout — is based on the latest research by Tony Fiorillo, who will release findings this fall describing a new species of the dinosaur that was unique to Alaska.

“It’s an Alaskan story about Alaska dinosaurs filmed in Alaska,” said producer John Copeland. “That’s why we’re here.”

Copeland’s best-known work is as producer of the 110-episode run of “Babylon 5” in the mid- to late-1990s. He also was a producer on the 2001 Discovery Channel documentary “When Dinosaurs Roamed America,” also an Evergreen Films project.

Tongue-twisting dino names now come easily to Copeland, who said “Walking with Dinosaurs 3D” is working with a team of paleontologists such as Fiorillo to root the film’s dramatic story in the latest advances in research.

“In the last 25 years, we’ve learned more than the previous 150,” Copeland said. “We’re learning more almost every year. It’s like digital technology. The amount of knowledge is just leaps forward. This is a counter-intuitive dinosaur story because who would have thought dinosaurs lived in Alaska, lived above the Arctic Circle?”

Copeland spoke of character development without dialogue.

“Our protagonist is the last of his clutch of eggs to hatch,” Copeland said. “He’s the runt of the litter. You wonder how he’s going to make it. Dinosaurs laid 20 or so eggs, and out of those eggs one or two would make it to adulthood. He’s curious, very cooperative … survival of the fittest in the true sense of the word doesn’t mean the strongest or the biggest or the baddest.

“It means the most adaptable and that’s how our guy gets through the day. He’s very adaptable and we think that will appeal to the viewer no matter what their age is.”

This article appears in the September 2011 issue of Alaska Journal of Commerce

Movie Filming In Alaska Creates New Jobs

4:16 p.m. AKDT, November 2, 2011



Video: Movie Filming in Alaska Creates New Jobs

video by Carolyn Hall Jensen (KTUU-OT)

(2:07)

Filming on movie 'The Frozen Ground' could be seen from parts of 5th Ave. on Wednesday.

The movie stars John Cusack and Nicholas Cage. The movie is about serial killer Robert Hansen.

He owned a bakery in Anchorage and was convicted in 1984 of killing 17 women and raping another 30 over a 12 year period of time. Hansen got a 461 year sentence and is in prison in Seward.

Cusack is playing Hansen and Cage is playing a cop in the movie. Filming on the movie began Oct. 17th and is expected to finish Nov. 18th.

This is another major movie production being made in Alaska after the state began its movie tax credit program about three years ago. The tax credit lets filmmakers recoup up to 44% of their spending.

With more movies being made in the state some Alaskans are starting companies that cater to the industry.

Douglas Hartmann started his company Graffiti Graphics about a year and a half ago. He creates sets and signs that are featured in films.

'Big Miracle' formally known as 'Everybody Loves Whales' was his first job. He is now working on 'The Frozen Ground' making signs along 5th Avenue.

"I'm really excited," Hartmann said, "when it comes out I'm going to be like, 'I did that.'"

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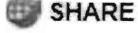
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Film Production's Boost to Unlikely Businesses

A bump in business to restaurants and hotels is typical during filming, but what about motorhome rentals?

By Alexis Fernandez

[Bio](#) | [Email](#)

Story Created: Nov 4, 2011 at 12:24 PM AKST
(Story Updated: Nov 4, 2011 at 12:24 PM AKST)

The filming of another major Hollywood movie continues to benefit Anchorage businesses.

It's been several weeks since production began on "The Frozen Ground" starring John Cusack and Nicolas Cage. Since then, businesses like John Marquardt's ABC Motorhomes has enjoyed a significant boost.

It "keeps us going through the winter, which normally, you know, we wouldn't be renting anything hardly," he said.

Business has doubled for nearly two months and he has rented out an additional 20 motorhomes for the winter.

"That's been a plus. [It] pays the light bills," Marquardt said.

But ABC Motorhomes isn't the only place cashing in—so are coffee shops, like Kaladi Brothers.

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"It's very exciting to us seeing Hollywood with Kaladi Brothers products, and coffee cups and visiting our shops," said Dale Tran, chief operating officer for Kaladi Brothers.

He said it's a chance for Alaskans to show off.

"It's a reciprocating role. They support local businesses and local businesses are happy to share with outsiders what Alaskans can do when it comes to food and coffee," he said.

So whether it's a warm temporary home or a warm coffee, Anchorage business owners feel everyone is benefiting from the Hollywood lights.

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Filmmakers Want Tax Incentive Program Extended

Bill passed senate last session, now in house

By Alexis Fernandez

[Bio](#) | [Email](#)

Story Created: Jan 23, 2012 at 10:23 AM AKST

(Story Updated: Jan 23, 2012 at 10:23 AM AKST)

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Some film industry officials are urging lawmakers to extend the film tax incentive program that's credited for bringing up a number of film productions to the Last Frontier.

Mike Devlin from Evergreen Films is urging the legislature to continue the tax incentive program to help keep its first 3-D production company here in Alaska.

The \$100 million program approved back in 2009 is set to expire in 2013.

Under the current senate bill, sponsored by Senator Johnny Ellis, the program would be extended another 10 years and another \$200 million.

So far the program has approved a total of about \$14.3 million in tax credits for almost three dozen productions, including 16 reality shows and 10 feature films that spent nearly \$45 million in the state since 2009.

The senate passed the bill last session but stalled in the house, which is expected to revisit the issue again this session.



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Kulis Air Force Base A Possible Film Production Site?

Speaking at the Alaska International Air Cargo Summit, officials from the Department of Commerce said Kulis Air Force Base could become the new home of the state's burgeoning film industry.

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Story Created: Aug 31, 2011 at 7:39 PM AKST
(Story Updated: Sep 1, 2011 at 7:24 AM AKST)

The military is one of the largest employers in Alaska, and it may be about to join forces with another growing industry: the movie business.

Speaking at the Alaska International Air Cargo Summit, officials from the Department of Commerce said Kulis Air Force Base could become the new home of the state's burgeoning film industry.

Local airport management said they're considering proposals to lease portions of the base to private production companies, who would develop the abandoned hangers into Alaska's first film campus.

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"I think the probability of using it on an interim basis is probably fairly high," said John Parrott, manager of Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. "There aren't a lot of hurdles for short term use, the FAA understands that type of situation."

The Department of Defense is scheduled to transfer the base to airport management on September 15, and Parrott said the airport could move forward on potential leases as soon as October.

Rich Wilson, a consultant working for the Department of Commerce, said there has been a flood of interest in the partially vacated base.

While private sector film companies continue to develop new facilities, Wilson said leasing the base would provide a vital boost to a fast-growing industry.

"Until the private sector develops its own campus and facilities to accommodate the larger feature films, for example, then we may be able to use this," Wilson said.



State Money Approved To Expand Alaska's Film Industry

Governor signs off on \$486K to train locals interested in entertainment

By Alexis Fernandez

[Bio](#) | [Email](#)

Story Created: Jul 7, 2011 at 10:47 AM AKST

(Story Updated: Jul 7, 2011 at 10:55 AM AKST)

ANCHORAGE—Gov. Sean Parnell (R-AK) has approved \$486,000 in this year's capital budget to train Alaskans to prepare for projects in the film and television industry headed to the state.

The grants will help grow the local workforce so entertainment professionals can properly train those who want to join the industry.

"We have an industry here, it's a small industry," said Bob Crockett, president of Alaska Film Group. "We need to kick it up a couple notches and respond to these productions that are now coming into the state."

Film tax incentives from the state have helped bring multi-million dollar movies up here, and film industry say having additional funding to make sure locals are trained is crucial.

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"We don't want Alaska's talented crew going out of state to find work," said Deborah Schildt, instructor for Alaska Crew Training. "It's an opportunity to really put Alaskans to work and keep them here."

The state Senate unanimously passed a 10-year extension of the film tax incentives. It's scheduled to be taken up by the House Finance Committee in January when legislators head back to Juneau.



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Barrow Movie "On The Ice" Set to Open in Alaska



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by [Rebecca Palsha](#)
Channel 2 News

11:35 a.m. AKST, December 21, 2011

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -

[On the Ice Trailer](#)



A feature film shot entirely on location in Barrow, Alaska will have its first home state screenings in early 2012.

"On The Ice" is a fictional story about young teenagers from Barrow getting away with murder.

On February 17th, the movie will play at the Regal Tikahtnu Stadium in Anchorage and at the Regal Goldstream Theatre in Fairbanks.

The movie has been a festival favorite ever since it debuted at the **Sundance** film festival in January, and then went to Berlin where it won the best first feature award.

But despite its accolades, it had a hard time finding a distributor.

Producers of the film asked for help online and started raising funds by starting a kickstarter page.

Hundreds of people donated money and the movie reached a goal of \$80,000 for distribution costs.

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Big Day for 'Big Miracle' Film

'Big Miracle' whales movie filmed in Alaska debuts Friday

By KTVA CBS 11 News

Story Created: Feb 3, 2012 at 8:28 PM AKST

(Story Updated: Feb 3, 2012 at 8:41 PM AKST)

Friday was the big day for Big Miracle – the film opened up across the country on February 3.

Tons of people put in a lot of work to rescue the whales in the late '80s, and then again to bring the story to the big screen.

National Guard personnel, big oil companies, Inupiat tribes, environmentalists and Russians came together during the Cold War era in the story, now made famous on the silver screen.

In 1988, the Alaska National Guard played an important role saving a family of whales trapped beneath the ice near Barrow.

The Guard again played an important role by having a dedicated person on the set of the movie to advise the actors and directors.

All the extras who played military members in the film are current Alaska National Guardsman.

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Alaska Tourism on the Comeback Trail



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Tourism Industry Hopeful For Rebounds

(KTUU-TV)

(3:18)

By Rhonda McBride

Channel 2 News

9:10 p.m. AKDT, May 9, 2011

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—

After several years of trending downward, tourism in Alaska appears to be on the rebound. That's the message the industry brought to the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce at its Monday luncheon.

Topics

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"We're expecting growth this year," says Julie Saupe, president of the Alaska Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

Saupe told the chamber that tourism is off to a good start in 2011, with a 12.5 percent increase in Anchorage hotel occupancy during the first three months of the year. Overall, she expects a five to six percent increase this year, with more than a million visitors.

Those who track tourism point to some favorable signs, like the return of Korean Air to the summer flight schedule as well as new airlines, such as Jet Blue and Eidelweiss Air, based in Switzerland.

Statewide, slightly less tourism growth is anticipated, somewhere between 4 and 5 percent. Though modest, it reverses a downward trend. Last summer, Alaska saw about 1.5 million tourists – down by about 200,000 from 2007.

The 2011 season is not without some big question marks. Will the disaster recovery in Japan keep tourists home? What about the tornadoes and floods in the Lower 48, not to mention rising fuel prices?

Dee Buchanon of CIRI Alaska Tourism says the state has one thing in its favor – the explosion of Alaska-themed reality shows like *Ice Road Truckers* and Sarah Palin's *Alaska*.

"No matter what you think about politics," Buchanon told the chamber, "our former governor's rise to fame really puts Alaska on everyone's mind as a visitor destination."

Julie Saupe with ACVB says there are other programs in the pipeline that will help promote Alaska. A Travel Channel show, "Burt the Conqueror," is featuring the Fur Rondy this month. Another big boost should come this fall with the premiere of a movie filmed in Alaska, "Everybody Loves Whales."

Even so, industry experts stressed the importance of continuing to spend money on TV ads in the Lower 48 to sustain the turnaround.

John Binkley, president of the Alaska Cruise Association, says worldwide, the cruise industry is growing, but competition for a share of this new market is tough.

In Alaska, the cruise ship industry anticipates a sluggish recovery, with only a slight uptick in passengers from 2010 – about 9,000 passengers, or a one percent increase.

Binkley says changes come more slowly, because the industry makes decisions about its fleet at least 18 months in advance.

The industry is projecting about 887,000 Alaska passengers this season, compared to more than a million in 2007.

"Let's look ahead to 2012," Binkley told the chamber. "And that's where you will really start to see the impact of the Governor reaching out and the changes that were made."

Binkley credits Gov. Sean Parnell with helping to lower industry taxes and improve the regulatory climate. He says next year Princess will bring another ship to Alaska – "a grand class ship that will translate into about 50,000 more visitors to Alaska."

As the chamber watched TV ads in the new "Alaska Beyond Your Dreams" campaign at the Egan Center, a dream tourist was checking out the visitor's center just around the corner.

Sean MacLeod is here for the aerospace medical convention at the Dena'ina Center, which has brought 1,600 people to Anchorage. The convention was booked in 2005.

"And now, a mere six years later," says ACVB President Julie Saupe, "here they are in town spending their money."

Saupe says there's very little instant gratification in the tourism business, because the pay-out is often years down the road.

MacLeod will no doubt contribute to Alaska tourism's bottom line this year. He and a colleague like to try different foods, so they plan on hitting a lot of restaurants during their four days here, as well as take in some tours.

"I'm more focused in on animals, so I'm trying to find something we'll be able to see some wildlife, definitely things we wouldn't necessarily see in Houston, Texas."

And MacLeod says he's prepared to spend.

"Typically when I go on a business trip, I try to make sure I have enough money, where I won't restrict myself, where I won't have any regrets."

MacLeod says he uses business trips to scout out vacations for his family – and Alaska might be a possibility. Perhaps not this year, but someday.



North Stars

The state of Alaska inspires TV shows and films

By Julia O'Malley

Ferno and Jim Tweto never considered their lives, spent running a small air service out of the tiny Bering Sea village of Unalakleet, to be out of the ordinary. In bush Alaska, where roads are few, everything from mail to duct tape to cases of Sunny Delight has to travel by air over miles of mountainous, uninhabited country.



Weather patterns snarl flight schedules. Temperatures can drop to 40 below.

With Jim and a stable of other pilots in the cockpits, Fern as the dispatcher and cargo runner, and adult daughters Ayla and Aneil helping out on the ground, Era Alaska (an Alaska Airlines partner airline) keeps medicine, groceries and people moving safely in and out of the Last Frontier State's remote villages, large and small.

"Fern and me, what we do every day is normal humdrum business," Jim Tweto says.

But for the Discovery Channel, getting a window into the Twetos' world has been like striking gold. *Flying Wild Alaska*, a show about the Twetos and their family business, drew 2.6 million viewers to its premiere episode last winter—more than any other Discovery show series premiere. That's more than three times as many viewers as the population of the entire state of Alaska, an audience 3,000 times larger than the population of Unalakleet.

Over the last several years, Alaska has become a magic word in the film and television industries.

A major feature film, *Everybody Loves Whales*, based on the story of three gray whales trapped in Arctic ice near Point Barrow in 1900, brought film stars Drew Barrymore, Kristen Bell and John Krasinski to the state last summer for months of filming the story of the international effort to rescue the whales. The film is due to be released in early 2012.

Actor Jon Voight, at work on smaller films, is a regular sight in Anchorage restaurants and coffee shops.

Over the last two years, more than 20 film projects, now in different stages of completion, have been undertaken in the



JAMES O. FRABOLT, COURTESY, NOT

Television viewers are fascinated by Alaska's aviation lifestyle. At left, the Tweto family—Ayla, Ariel, Jim and Ferno—operators of Era Alaska, are the stars of the popular *Flying Wild Alaska* on the Discovery Channel. Above, National Geographic produced a three-part special, *Alaska Wing Men*, which included coverage of Talkeetna Air Taxi.

state, according to the Alaska State Film Office.

Helped by a new state tax credit, the Alaska-based film business continues to gain momentum, and Alaska-based reality-television production is approaching full speed. Gold miners, pilots, truck drivers, fishermen and former governors have provided the vast state with what is probably more television screen time than is enjoyed by any other state in the country.

"You turn the cable on just about any night of the week and you see a show about Alaska," says Dave Worrell, manager of the state film office.

The approximately two-year-old state film tax-credit program, which reimburses about a third of the money spent on qualifying production expenses in Alaska, has issued credits for roughly \$6.5 million so far. That means there's been about \$19 million in total spending on film and television since the program began. If all the projects the state is tracking happen, and producers spend their proposed budgets, total spending could approach \$300 million in the next several years. Among the projects tracked by the film office, "non-fiction TV" makes up the largest number of applications, followed by feature films, with the balance of projects in scripted television, documentaries and commercials.

DISCOVERY CHANNEL, a leader in Alaska-based reality television, learned one thing early on:

"Any time we featured Alaska, we would see a pop in the ratings," says Nancy Daniels, executive vice president of production and development.

The state is just "inherently interesting," she says. It offers a wide variety of extreme

settings, from mountains to glaciers to roaring ocean; unpredictable weather; and lots of high-stakes on-the-job situations. Put that all together, and you have on-screen scenarios that can really scare you, Daniels says.

That's thrilling. That makes good TV. There's also something about Alaska's mystique as an isolated, untouched place that appeals to the American imagination in a way that is unmatched by any other state.

"Alaska kind of signifies, in a way, the American dream," Daniels says. "There's a little bit of the Wild West there. You can go there and be anything, kind of on your own terms."

Discovery has had plenty of Alaska-based success. Launched in 2005, *Deadliest Catch*, filmed aboard commercial crab boats as they are tossed about in the brutal, icy Bering Sea, is one of the channel's most successful shows. In addition to that



ALASKA REALITY SHOWS

Following are a few of the most popular Alaska-based reality television programs.

ALASKA STATE TROOPERS

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL

Follows Alaska's force of roughly 400 troopers who patrol the vast state, often traveling hundreds of miles by air to respond to crimes and emergencies in remote locations.

ALASKA WING MEN

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL

Follows Alaska bush pilots as they ferry supplies and make rescues in treacherous conditions.

BEFORE THE FREEZE: MOUNTAIN MEN OF ALASKA (Early 2012)

DISCOVERY CHANNEL

Follows the Ketchikan family, including patriarch Atz Kilcher (father of pop/folk singer Jewel), living the off-the-grid homesteader life near Homer, Alaska.



COURTESY OF DISCOVERY CHANNEL

Above: *Deadliest Catch* is the popular leader of Alaska-based reality TV, and the crab boat *Northwestern*, shown above in Season 6, has been with the show from the start. The crew of the *Seabrooke* (inset), led by Captain Scott Campbell Jr. (center), joined the series just last season. The show follows crab boats on the Bering Sea, working out of Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

Left: Wildlife trooper Ken Vanspronken gets ready to head out on airboat patrol at Tanana Flats during filming of the National Geographic Channel show *Alaska State Troopers*.

and the Tweto family's *Flying Wild Alaska*, the channel also has *Gold Rush: Alaska*, which follows six men who move to Alaska to work a gold claim. The network has plans for another show, as well, with the working title *Before the Freeze: Mountain Men of Alaska*. The series will feature the family of pop/folk singer Jewel

Kilcher, living off the grid and off the land outside the village of Homer. Look for it in early 2012.

An exotic setting and extreme situations may be essential building blocks for reality television, but reality shows are fueled by personalities. Alaska seems to have plenty of the kind of people viewers

DEADLIEST CATCH

DISCOVERY CHANNEL

Follows fishermen in the lucrative and sometimes dangerous Bering Sea crab fishery, where the dollar rewards are high and the seas are fierce. "They all come to the realization," the show promo reads, "that the most violent storms come from within."

FLYING WILD ALASKA

DISCOVERY CHANNEL

Follows the Tweto family, who run Era Alaska, a rural airline, out of Unalakleet. In extreme weather, they haul groceries, ferry patients and make a few rescues in the vast, uninhabited wilderness.

GOLD RUSH: ALASKA

DISCOVERY CHANNEL

Follows six men, burned by the economic downturn, who go to Alaska to mine for gold. Todd Hoffman of Sandy, Oregon, leads newbie miners who try to strike it rich before winter sets in.

ICE ROAD TRUCKERS

HISTORY CHANNEL

Follows big-rig drivers on the lonely ice roads as they dodge accidents and obstacles, delivering supplies north of the Arctic Circle.

MOUNTED IN ALASKA

HISTORY CHANNEL

Follows the taxidermists at Knight's Taxidermy in Anchorage, who serve people from local Alaskans to African hunters, to create some of the world's most unique mounts.



Jimmy Dorsey of the Discovery Channel show *Gold Rush: Alaska*.

want to follow, says Bridget Walen Hunicutt, senior vice president of global productions at National Geographic Channel.

"There are a lot of really strong characters you find there, people who kind of represent independence," she says.

National Geographic has done well with *Alaska State Troopers*, a show that combines the tried-and-true law-enforcement drama of the vintage reality show *Cops* with Alaska's scenery, characters and

conditions. The final episode of its second season attracted 1.2 million viewers, and across the 12 second-season episodes, the series drew audiences that were on average 47 percent larger than the channel's average. National Geographic also introduced a bush-pilot program of its own, *Alaska Wing Men*, which premiered in January 2011. The three-part special focused on the small-plane and helicopter pilots who are a lifeline to villages and work camps in the

remote, unforgiving reaches of Alaska.

In general, Alaska shows have attracted about 26 percent more viewers than the National Geographic Channel's average.

Another major player in the Alaska reality scene is the History Channel, in particular with its five-season hit *Ice Road Truckers*. Deeply character driven, it follows drivers such as barrel-chested Hugh Rowland and lip-glossed tough girl Lisa Kelly as they navigate treacherous roads

ALASKA IN FILM

THE GOLD RUSH (1925)

Charlie Chaplin, the Tramp, journeys solo to Alaska and the Klondike in search of gold. Filmed in California.

ESKIMO (1933)

Stars Native Alaskan Ray Wise Mala as a hunter learning to deal with unscrupulous traders. Shot in Alaska; billed at its New York premiere as "the biggest picture ever made."

SPAWN OF THE NORTH (1938)

George Raft, Henry Fonda and Dorothy Lamour in an Alaska salmon-fishing drama. Partially filmed in Alaska.

ICE PALACE (1960)

A fishing industry drama set during Alaska's struggle for statehood. Stars Richard Burton and Robert Ryan. Filmed in Petersburg, Alaska.

NORTH TO ALASKA (1960)

John Wayne strikes gold in Alaska. Film shot in California.

NEVER CRY WOLF (1983)

Disney film dramatizing work of a researcher sent north to study the impact of wolves on caribou herds. Filmed in Alaska.

WHITE FANG (1991)

Jack London's classic adventure about a gold-seeker and a mixed dog-wolf, starring Ethan Hawke. Filmed in Haines, Alaska.

ON DEADLY GROUND (1994)

Oil-industry drama set in Alaska starring Steven Seagal and Michael Caine. Parts of the film shot at Worthington Glacier near Valdez.



BALTO (1995)

Animated film telling the story of the 1925 diphtheria outbreak in Nome, Alaska, and the heroic effort to deliver life-saving serum—the event commemorated by the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

ALASKA (1996)

A young brother and sister head into the Alaska bush to find and rescue their lost father. Filmed in Alaska.



LIMBO (1999)

A story of people trying to reinvent themselves in Southeast Alaska. Filmed in Juneau.

MYSTERY, ALASKA (1999)

The New York Rangers travel to a small town in Alaska for a hockey game on the local pond. Stars Russell Crowe. Filmed in Alberta, Canada.

INSOMNIA (2002)

Al Pacino, Robin Williams and Hilary Swank investigate a murder in a small Alaska town. Filmed in Alaska and British Columbia.

SNOW DOGS (2002)

Cuba Gooding Jr. plays a Miami dentist who travels to Alaska to claim the dog-sled team he inherits. Filmed in Alberta.

GRIZZLY MAN (2005)

The tragic story of grizzly bear activist Timothy Treadwell. Filmed partially in Katmai National Park, Alaska.



30 DAYS OF NIGHT (2007)

The far-north town of Barrow, Alaska, in the darkness of winter, is beset with vampires. Filmed in New Zealand.

INTO THE WILD (2007)

The true adventures of Christopher McCandless as he hitchhikes to Alaska to live in the wilderness. Partially filmed in Alaska.

THE FOURTH KIND (2009)

Investigations into alien abductions in remote Alaska. Filmed in British Columbia.

THE PROPOSAL (2009)

Sandra Bullock ducking immigration investigations in Sitka, Alaska. Filmed in Massachusetts and California studios.

EVERYBODY LOVES WHALES (2012)

A small-town reporter writes about three whales stranded in Arctic ice and the effort of Cold War-era United States and USSR to rescue them. Alaska locations include Anchorage, Barrow and the Alaska SeaLife Center in Seward.

Top: Emile Hirsch portrays Christopher McCandless as he treks into the Alaska bush in *Into the Wild*. Center: Much of the recent *Everybody Loves Whales* filming took place in downtown Anchorage. Bottom: Al Pacino and Robin Williams star in *Insomnia*, a murder mystery set in an Alaska village during the long days of summer.

north of the Arctic Circle. Last season's premiere drew more than 3 million viewers, a 29 percent gain over the year before.

The Discovery Channel's Daniels also worked on TLC's *Sarah Palin's Alaska*, a travelogue-style show that offered glimpses into the former governor's family life.

"We knew people would be interested in her, and at the same time we knew people were interested in Alaska," Daniels says. "It seemed like a win-win."

The premiere drew 5 million viewers, the most for a premiere in TLC's history. Numbers eventually dropped off. Daniels considers the show a success even though it wasn't renewed for a second season.

Sometimes what's on television reflects the national mood. Take *Extreme Couponing* on TLC and *Design on a Dime* on HGTV. Both appeal to viewers enduring tough economic times, speaking to a national trend toward thrifty lifestyles. So, what is it about Alaska that keeps viewers coming back, especially right now?

For one, viewers seem to be craving an



COURTESY, MARY SAWYER COLLECTION
Much of *Eskimo* (1933) was shot near Teller on the Seward Peninsula. Here, Ray Wise Mala (at left in front of the screen) prepares for a scene with Eebrulik Rock, a Point Hope Inupiat. Of Eskimo and Russian descent, Mala was the first Native Alaskan actor to play a leading role in a Hollywood film.

escape into nature. Cable networks have seen success with nature shows in recent years, such as Discovery Channel's *Planet Earth* or NatGeo's *Great Migrations*, says Brian Lowry, TV columnist and critic for *Variety*.

Alaska programming is an extension of that trend, but that's not all that's going on.

"Mostly because of *Deadliest Catch*, there has been a lot of interest in program-

ming about manly men doing tough, dangerous jobs," Lowry says.

Reality stars work on crab boats; they fly into snowstorms; they toil in remote, bear-ridden mining camps. Call it the "gruff-guys-who-don't-shower-with-a-lot-of-bad-mustaches-who-try-to-make-money-by-nearly-killing-themselves" genre, he says.

According to Discovery, Alaska shows draw a disproportionately middle-aged,

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MARQUETTE

male audience. Average age for *Deadliest Catch* viewers? 41. Sixty-one percent of them are men. The average age for those watching *Flying Wild Alaska* is 51. Seven out of 10 of those viewers are male.

These viewers' tastes might be shaped by the economy, Lowry says. Most of the shows are about making money. There's a



©HOMER MINTON/PACIFIC TOWNS, INC.

An Army Corps of Engineers boat approaches Hubbard Glacier on the Discovery Channel reality show *Extreme Alaska*.

lot of risk involved and a touch of desperation. Some Americans probably relate to those feelings.

Lowry admits that "Alaska reality" is not his favorite genre. Sometimes the shows can feel staged, he says. And they tend to blend together with their manly, woodsy themes.

"The guys featured in the shows—they kind of look like they are shopping at the same store," he says.

Despite the big payoffs, shooting television and film around Alaska isn't easy. Days are long in the summer, but the season is short. Weather routinely delays travel to the more rural parts of the state, and it can trap a crew in a location for days. Bears on the set are not uncommon. And, of course, where the manly men go, so too must the film crew.

"Our film crews have to become a part of that ship's crew," says Daniels about shooting *Deadliest Catch*. "I know there's a bit of 'How tough are the film-crew members? Are they going to be like greenhorns getting sick over the side of the boat?'"

For the film industry, support staff can become a major challenge. Television crews are smaller and more nimble, but a

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large film requires all kinds of logistical people on the ground.

A micro-economy sprouted up in Anchorage around the filming of *Everybody Loves Whales*, pumping millions into the state economy, says Worrell of the state film office. The movie required builders, architects, caterers and even an upholsterer. Some of them had to be flown in from outside the state, but since that movie was shot, the state has created a directory of more than 250 vendors ready to support the next film. The idea is to keep more of the movie-production spending in state, with local vendors and labor, Worrell says.

Back in Unalakleet, the Twetos now field messages from all over the world. Old friends and long-lost relatives; people who want to work for them. Viewers curious about hours of daylight or "stink flipper," an Alaska Native food featured on their show that is made from bearded-seal flipper that's been fermenting in the ground for seven weeks. The couple now sees why people might want to watch a show about their life.

"We consider we have a pretty unique lifestyle," Jim Tweto says.

Alaska State Trooper Lance Ewers, a regular on *Alaska State Troopers*, says he moved to Alaska because of Alaska reality television. He was working in Montana when he happened to catch footage of troopers on the History Channel show *Tougher in Alaska*, about rough northern jobs.

"I said to myself, 'What a cool job that would be.'"

Ewers made a call and applied. A year later, he found himself riding around with a crew of reality-TV producers, on the National Geographic Channel's *Alaska State Troopers*.

Alaska, he says, is full of intriguing people. It makes sense that it's attracting so many cameras.

"I think they realized that Hollywood couldn't make these stories up." ▲

Julia O'Malley is an Anchorage-based writer and a metro columnist for the Anchorage Daily News.



ALASKA TRAVEL INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2011

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See PAGE 2, ATIA Awards
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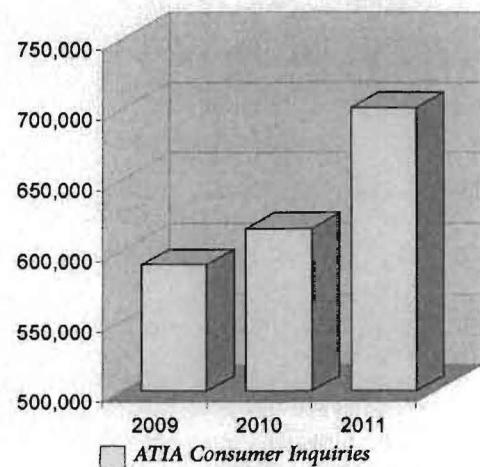
ATIA shared a booth with six member businesses at International POWWOW 2011, the U.S. Travel Association's premier marketing event, held in San Francisco, May 21-25. Meetings were conducted with 190 members of the international travel trade and stories were pitched to 46 media.

Alaska Travel Information Requests Up 14%

The Alaska Travel Industry Association reports 701,214 inquiries for Alaska travel information, an increase of 14 percent. ATIA attributes this improvement to increased funding for domestic marketing and strengthened consumer demand for travel.

"2011 is the first year we have received over 700,000 inquiries since 2000," said Kathy Dunn, ATIA director of marketing. "We are thrilled that our research-based advertising campaign is inspiring more travelers to visit Alaska."

ATIA forecasts that 15 percent of those who request information will travel to Alaska in 2011. This projection is a substantial increase in conversion from 12 percent measured in 2010. Look for upcoming newsletter announcements with final 2011 visitation figures and conversion results.



Graze To Raise For Alaska

Visitor Industry raises \$65,112 for non-profits

Alaska travel businesses and community members "grazed to raise" during the Alaska Visitor Industry Charity Walks held in Anchorage and Fairbanks, May 2011.

The Anchorage event, a collaboration between the Anchorage Convention & Visitors Center and the ATIA Anchorage Chapter, raised \$39,249 with a 5K walking course throughout downtown, May 6, 2011. Approximately 1,300 walkers were led to a variety of food stations featuring donated appetizers from local restaurants and hotels.

A similar walk was conducted through the golden heart city of Fairbanks, May 13, 2011. The Fairbanks Convention & Visitors Bureau partnered with the ATIA Fairbanks Chapter to organize the event. Fifty charities benefited from \$25,863 raised by 400 walkers.

"Organizing the Fairbanks Visitor Industry Charity Walk for the last eight years has been very rewarding," said Karen Lane, event organizer and FCVB vice president of visitor services and membership. "It is a great collaborative effort between non-profits and the Fairbanks visitor industry to raise funds for local community groups who better the lives of individuals and families throughout the Interior."



Employees with the Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District serve up an Alaska Grown "Taste of Alaska" sampling at the walkers' last stop at the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center during the Fairbanks Visitor Industry Charity Walk, May 13, 2011. Eighteen tourism-oriented businesses also provided complimentary food and snacks for the event.

The charity walks celebrated their 12th year with the two festive events that raised a combined total of \$65,112 for non-profits throughout the state including the Food Bank of Alaska, Anchorage School District soccer teams, Make-a-Wish Foundation, the Blood Bank of Alaska and dozens of other 501(c)(3) organizations.