

POSTED ON 15/03/06

B.C. film and TV facing banner year as spending soars

Tax credits help keep the studios booked

PETER KENNEDY

VANCOUVER -- British Columbia's film and television sector is looking ahead to another banner year after seeing production spending in the province soar to \$1.2-billion in 2005, an increase of 50 per cent from 2004.

"We are off to an amazing start already," said Tom Adair, executive director of the B.C. Council of Film Unions.

Production studios are booked up and the sector is bouncing back from the negative impact of a fast-rising loonie in 2004.

Mr. Adair attributed the rosy outlook to the B.C. government's decision to match tax credits offered in other regions of the country.

"That was a huge message from the government that it wasn't prepared to let provinces like Ontario and Quebec take business away from us," Mr. Adair said.

He said British Columbia has also benefited as major studios ramp up productions ahead of possible labour disruptions by members of the Screen Actors Guild in California next year.

In B.C., the increased activity in 2005 was driven largely by increased spending on foreign feature-film productions such as *Scary Movie 4* and *X-Men 3*.

Spending on foreign feature films was \$580.2-million in 2005, up from \$191.6-million the previous year.

That pushed the combined value of foreign film, television and animation production to just over \$1-billion in 2005, up from \$587.3-million in 2004, which was seen as a slow year for the sector.

By comparison, total spending on domestic productions was rather flat, rising to \$224.8-million last year from \$213.9-million in 2004.

"This level of film and television production has not been seen since 2003 -- our strongest year ever," said Olga Ilich, the Minister of Tourism, Sports and Arts.

Industry officials said they are pleased with the increase in spending on foreign and domestic animation content, which more than doubled to \$85.4-million last year, from \$37.4-million in 2004.

They attribute the increase to a combination of tax credits and the pool of artistic talent that has built up around a thriving film and video-game production sector.

"It is not like trying to draw talent to Saskatoon in November," said Chuck Johnson, a senior vice-president with Nerd Corp., a Vancouver animation firm.

The BC Film Commission said more than 200 productions were completed in the province in 2005.

That included 63 feature films, 31 television series, 37 movies-of-the-week, 15 television pilots, five miniseries, 20 documentaries, 16 short films and 24 animation projects.

© Copyright 2006 Bell Globemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

