

Local film industry expected to grow in slow motion

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Stall possible without state incentive, industry execs say.

There are lights and cameras, but the action is a little slow when it comes to the region's motion picture and sound recording industries.

Those sectors are expected to grow at a 2.42 percent annual rate, adding only about 500 jobs during the next eight years, says the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation's Labor Market Statistics Center.

The expected growth rate is far less than in recent years, when those industries grew at annual rates as much as 10.3 percent and added more than 100 or 200 jobs a year, says the state agency.

There are currently 2,568 people employed in the film and recording industries locally -- almost all are in film -- including 239 people hired last year. The total is projected to grow to 3,063 by 2015.

"Growth is growth," says Suzy Allen, vice president of film and digital media development for the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission.

And, she says, as long as the state continues to have a \$25 million annual incentive budget to attract movie production crews to make their films in Florida, that will continue to create growth.

The incentive is important for the region because the film, digital media and entertainment production industry accounted for \$845.5 million in dollars generated in 2004, the most recent year for which data is available.

Allen says all the motion picture projects either recently shot in the region or currently in production have received money from the incentive fund.

Without that incentive, which could be threatened by state lawmakers anxious to cut taxes this year, a lot of projects could go away, she says. "Commercial production will remain strong, but features and television will drop off significantly. We will become a lot less competitive in the global marketplace.

"Any state in any given year can come up with a great incentive, and it will have an impact," adds Allen. "It's a fair-weather industry -- it goes where the money is."

There are currently two feature film productions -- one called Bait Shop and the other another sequel to the Beethoven movies involving a St. Bernard dog -- and one reality television show, Bridal Boot Camp, shooting in the region now.

"The film incentive is great -- I wish it were more," says Dominic Carola, president of Orlando-based animation firm Premise Entertainment LLC and president of Project Firefly Animation Studios.

Project Firefly handled some of the primary animation work for Universal Pictures' and Imagine Entertainment's 2006 Curious George movie. "I hope folks understand how much talent, including veteran talent, is here," he says. "It's a big advantage to have local talent to get work here."

Even after a good 2006 and a so-so 2007, Bob Allen, chief executive officer of Orlando digital media company i.d.e.a.s., expects a good 2008 and beyond. "I'm not irrationally bullish," he says, "but I'm confident we will grow over the next couple of years."