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Montana Film Office Help Sponsor LAFF, Unveils New Incentive Package

By Lucas Shaw

Sten Iversen, manager of the Montana Film Office, came to the Los Angeles Film Festival this year to launch his new Studio 406 incentive package. A veteran of the festival dating back to its first year, Iversen sees it as the perfect place to sell independent filmmakers on the benefits of filming in Montana.



Just moments after landing at LAX, his beliefs were validated as he spent nearly two hours in traffic trying to get to his hotel. Crews filming in Montana would face no such problems since his incentive package offers free traffic control signage. Traditionally, when production needs to close a street or highway they must rent the signage from a traffic control company.

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"In Montana that would take less than 10 minutes," Iversen said of the 10-mile drive. "Time is money."

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While free traffic signage may not entice the major studios, Iversen has built a package of sustainable incentives for smaller budget projects. It offers standard perks, like tax credits, and more specialized benefits, such as free office furniture and no sales tax.

"For a studio, a \$500,000 office space is like 'so what?'," Iversen said. "For a \$5 million dollar film, that's great."

The package's tax credits are not as high as those offered by other states, but Iversen suspects that given the current economic climate, they are more realistic in the long-term.

"I think we'll see states with huge incentives have to cut programs," Iversen said. "Other states are not in good shape financially. We're in a good state. We are in the black."

Iversen wrote the first incentive package in 2005 after watching more and more studios choose Canada for film locations. He then revised it two years later, giving bigger tax credits, and this year saw it extended until 2015.

The recent extension prompted Iversen to search for a launching point and he settled on a festival he had been coming to for years. "Sundance is great but I thought it would be better to launch it in is the heart of the business," he said.

In exchange for a booth and advertising at the festival, the Montana Film Office financed a film financing conference, a major reception and some of the festival. "It was a nice way of putting out 80,000 images of Montana," Iversen said.

Montana has served as the location for more than 110 films to date, the most recent of which opens today - "My Sister's Keeper" starring Cameron Diaz and Abigail Breslin. With Montana's long workdays and large production hub in Bozeman, Iversen hopes that number only continues to rise.

Earlier this year, the state showcased its ability to plan an event, hosting the premiere of "Call of the Wild," starring Christopher Lloyd.

Still, Iversen knows his state only works for certain projects. "If a script calls for Downtown Los Angeles, we can help," he said. "But if you are looking for unspoiled beauty in the lower 48 [states], that's what we have."

KEYWORDS Montana Film Office | My Sister's Keeper

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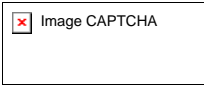
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