



Making Waves

New studio seeks to make area a film destination

Louisiana Wave Studio has as its goal to offer all of the services needed in movie production from motion capture to post-production

Louisiana Wave Studio has embarked on a three-phase plan to help cement north Louisiana as a viable movie-making venue for the future by providing services to continue to attract producers.

The opportunity arose when partners Ken Atchity and Fred Griffin saw the latent potential in the wave tank Disney Pictures built for its production of “The Guardian.”

Atchity said they learned the tank was scheduled for demolition, partly because it was a liability issue and partly because the film had completed production. But the two men decided that this tank, with its ability to create a variety of wave features, could be the cornerstone of their new venture.

They made a deal with their insurance people, and then they worked with the Sealy Group and Disney and acquired the property in Slack Industrial Park. Next, they raised needed capital to make the other two parts of their plan a reality. Ultimately, they want to make this area a film destination by offering services for which producers are looking.

“Our goal is to offer all the services they need, including motion capture and animation ... everything you need in one place,” Atchity said.

Since Hurricane Katrina drove many film

production companies to the Shreveport-Bossier City area, the lure of tax incentives to produce in this area has produced a spate of movie-making activity. Atchity said \$200 million was spent in the area last year, of which \$60 million stayed in the local economy. But producers faced returning to California or New York for post-production, and those tax incentives aren’t available there.

The need to make the entire process financially beneficial is the motivation for the rest of the Atchity-Griffin plan for Louisiana Wave Studio.

Part two is to build a major post-production facility, a project that will cost in the neighborhood of \$20 million, Atchity said. The final phase includes the construction of soundstages for TV and film production. These stages are planned to complement the stages David Wyatt, whom Atchity described as a “visionary,” realized at StageWorks on the riverfront. When complete, the facility will be able to offer the entire range of services moviemakers are looking for, said Atchity, and the tax incentives will be preserved since all the work will be done in Louisiana.

That’s not the entire solution, though,

Atchity added. “The biggest problem with Shreveport for filmmaking right now is air transportation,” he said. “You can spend more to get to Shreveport than New York. It’s crazy a city as thriving and attractive as Shreveport doesn’t have better air service.”

Atchity labeled the area as not a film-friendly environment for that reason but said he still considers it a viable film production locale for the future. The partners are already in negotiation with several film companies to use the tank in upcoming features. In addition, the group is also exploring non-movie applications for the facility, such as training for water rescue professionals.

While acknowledging some of the refugee film companies have been migrating back south, he said the tank offers north Louisiana an incredible piece of filmmaking infrastructure that will make this a sought-out locale. There are other places that can do similar wave production, but Atchity points out they have limitations.

“Vancouver has a tank that makes 2-foot waves, but it’s housed in a facility with a low roof. Baja, Calif., is where the mega-production ‘Titanic’ was filmed, but rental on that site is very expensive,” he said. “The Caribbean has a kind of tank in the open ocean, so it’s not fully controlled. Malta has a good tank, but you have to put the whole production – cast, equipment, crew, everything – in a boat to get there. It’s not the easiest place to get to.” The local tank can generate 13 kinds of waves of up to 8 feet high to give directors a great amount of flexibility in their storytelling.

Those factors, coupled with the positive reviews the local filmmaking experiences have garnered, are the partners’ major selling points. They characterize their plan as an upward line of improvement for Louisiana film. South Louisiana enjoyed a number of benefits from the film industry for many years, they said, but producers were aware that situation was dangerous in terms of pitting sections of the state that never saw production against the New Orleans area.

Atchity said the companies want to bring film to Louisiana if the facilities are available. He warned, “Shreveport needs to be ready to take up the overflow from the New Orleans area.”

With the acquisition of the wave tank and the construction of the support services and facilities, Atchity and Griffin are confident north Louisiana will continue to make waves in the entertainment industry.

– Joe Todaro