

Film studio created to market Tahoe-Reno

By Anne Knowles, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

The Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority wants to be in motion pictures – and it's created a studio to help make it happen.

The RSCVA has launched Film Reno Tahoe to market Reno, Lake Tahoe and other Northern Nevada locations for television and film production and to act as a satellite to the Nevada Film Office in Las Vegas, says Chris Baum, RSCVA's president and CEO.

As part of that effort, the RSCVA has established Reno Tahoe Studios, a 300,000-square-foot facility comprising six stages and office space inside the cavernous and often empty convention center on South Virginia Street in Reno.

"We have a half-million-square-foot building that is not utilized on a regular basis. It's like having a church for Easter Sunday only," says Baum. "Halls one and two are the busiest, and three through five are not used as much. If we have the space and it costs us \$1.95 to reposition it, why not?"

Baum says the building's high-ceilings make it easy to hang lights and equipment, and its space can be configured into any number of sets, making it ideal for film and TV production. He and his team have already started showing it off.

"We've brought in film and TV producers and toured them through the facility and they told us it's better than what they use elsewhere," says Baum. "There's also catering on site, offices, break-out rooms."

Baum says Northern Nevada is ideal, too, because of its varied landscapes and city streets that can double for New York City, Washington, D.C., even London. And proximity to Hollywood is a selling point, too, since studio executives can fly in, check on productions and fly home in the same day.

The division announced their first coup last week. The musical group Savvy, which has been featured in a Starz show called "The Wannabes," is filming the pilot for a new show in northern Nevada locations later this year and plan to continue filming here if the show is picked up.

"They have a good track record, and it is basically a spin off so it will be easier to sell," says Baum. "We've also had a number of film producers in town who are looking at the area for several films, but they're waiting to see if the incentives pass."

The "incentives" is Senate Bill 165, now being considered by the Nevada Legislature, a bill with the goal of attracting film and TV production to the state.

A similar bill was floated last session and did not pass, and this legislation, too, has its opponents. But Baum thinks it's the right mix of inducements and restrictions needed to attract business here to the overall benefit of the state.

The bill offers what Baum calls middle-of-the-pack incentives – perks not as generous as some other states offer but substantial enough that, when coupled with the state's other advantages, will attract movie makers. The bill, for example, requires 60 percent of a film or TV show be shot in Nevada and stipulates a 23-to-27 percent rebate tax incentive. Productions outside Las Vegas, for example, get an additional 2 percent in order to encourage production outside the Strip.

"The way you structure these things make all the difference in the world," says Baum. "You need to make them revenue neutral like this is." The bill was drafted with the help of Jeffrey

Spilman, a consultant and film and TV producer Baum knows from his days with the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Baum, who joined the RSCVA last year, created the Detroit Film division and helped grow Michigan's movie and TV production revenues from \$6 million to \$320 million in two years.