



Utah sets precedent for first student film incentive

Panel about incentive and its pilot project "Monster in the Attic" comes to Park City

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The town of Kanab in southern Utah's Kane County is permeated with a tradition of Hollywood filmmaking dating back to the late 1930s when "The Bad Man of Brimstone" and "The Lone Ranger" were filmed in the area.

It's a tradition Ted Hallisey, executive director of Kane County Tourism and Film Commission, is rekindling. "We wanted to bring movies back into the Kanab area," he said. "We thought high-budget films could not be reached, so we decided to target independent filmmakers."

But not just any independent filmmakers. The town has created an annual incentive competition to help university students from across the country realize their dream of producing a full-length feature film.

"I'm always wanting to give education a little boost if I can," he said. "It's nice to be able to help give students a start in the trade."

Hallisey brainstormed with Phil Peters, University of Central Florida associate professor of film and digital media, to help figure out how to bring the rich traditions of Westerns back to Kanab. "He was really the catalyst for this whole program," Hallisey said.

The pair first met in May 2006 and, by January 2007, they were accepting applications to run a pilot program for first Southern Utah Student Film Production Incentive.

"To my knowledge," Hallisey said, "we are the only entity hosting a student film incentive in the United States."

Basic requirements for submitting a script for the incentive, which is a cash contribution of \$15,000 to \$20,000, include: It must be a feature-length film; it can be any genre, but it must be Western-themed and 75 percent of principal photography must be shot in Kane County; the film must have between a G and PG-13 rating; and the student and his or her university, must each match the cash contribution of the incentive, equating to a minimum budget of \$45,000 to \$60,000.

As Hallisey and Peters were laying the foundation for their student film incentive, a film graduate student at the University of Central Florida, Danny Daneau, was laying the groundwork for his thesis, a full-length feature Western film titled "Monster in the Attic," which he was hoping to shoot in southern Utah.

Daneau had visited the Kane County area to film a documentary and was inspired by the environment. "I fell in love with the landscape," he said. Daneau approached Erica Harrel, his film's producer, to discuss the idea of filming "Monster in the Attic" in Utah.

He said he was unsure how she would react because, at this time, the incentive didn't exist yet, and Daneau knew it would be expensive to get the entire crew and equipment out there to film.

Harrel, however, responded well. "The value of shooting in the West," she said, "was an opportunity that we couldn't turn down."

Daneau heard about the incentive from Hallisey, whom he had met earlier while filming the documentary in southern Utah. He decided to work his script around the incentive's criteria in order to have the best shot at becoming its pilot project.

For students who dream to do feature films, Daneau said that it starts with the script. "It's the most cliché advice," he said. "But you need to hand it to as many people as possible. If you haven't ripped it up and started over again, it's not ready."

Daneau spent about two-and-a-half years writing "Monster in the Attic" and, at one point, he took his own advice and threw his script in the trash and brought another writer on to finish the job with him.

Daneau applied and was awarded the Southern Utah Student Film Production Incentive in February 2007, and by July, he and his

crew were on-site, in Kanab, filming. "The town really got behind the movie," he said. "We couldn't have done it without them."

Hallisey said it was fun for the locals as well, especially since it was an open set and the public could come and watch anytime. He said community members were helping anyway they could by providing livestock, giving discounts on rooms, and standing in for the two main children actors.

As part of the incentive agreement, Daneau was to use people from Utah in his crew as much as possible. They even had high-school students come from the Salt Lake area to be a part of the film. Hallisey said he is talking with universities and high schools about offering credit for participating in incentive productions.

"Monster in the Attic" was a valuable learning process for everyone involved, according to Harrel. "We helped hammer out the details," she said about the pilot program. Peters also brought on Sterling Van Wagenen, the co-founder of the Sundance Film Festival and former chairman of the University of Central Florida Film School, to help with the logistics of the program.

Harrel said that while there were a lot of kinks along the way, like a long casting process and challenges raising money, once they got on-site in Kanab, it was a pretty smooth shoot.

"It was nice to have our crew in town and be able to walk onto the set," she said. "It's such a huge opportunity for universities from around the country to be able to come to a place as magnificent as southern Utah and be able to film there."

The \$20,000 incentive didn't cover the whole budget of the movie, Daneau said, but it did cover the cost of getting the crew and equipment to Kanab, which was important because the landscape in the movie is a very dominant character.

"It's been a long journey. There are lots of hoops you have to go through," he said. "But I'm really proud of this movie. It's so much better than I ever thought it would be."

"Monster in the Attic," is the sort of story that's open for everyone, Daneau said. "It isn't a traditional Western," he said. "It's about two children who are left alone in the wilderness. It's a tribute to sibling love."

Daneau said he hopes to have the film completed this spring, which will make it a production four years in the making.

To learn more about the Southern Utah Student Film Production Incentive and its pilot project, "Monster in the Attic," the Utah Film Commission in conjunction with the Sundance Film Festival and Kane County Office of Tourism and Film Commission will be hosting a panel on Jan. 22 from 11 a.m. to noon at the Yarrow Hotel in Park City.

The incentive's Web site will be launched at noon that day as well, giving student filmmakers an equal opportunity to learn more about the program and begin putting together the materials necessary to apply before the incentive's 2008 deadline on Feb. 29.

"They're setting a national model," Daneau said.

Harrel added, "I just hope this incentive gets the attention it deserves, and I hope students take advantage of it to be able to come to a place like Kanab where the people are so gracious. It is amazing that we were the first ones that were able to do that."

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