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## Louisiana Film and Video: Interview Alex Schott

Louisiana



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The following is a Bayoubuzz interview with Alex Schott head of the Governor's Office for Film and Television Development. The Interview was performed by Gary Michael Smith.

With Meetup groups like Louisiana Producers and the HURD Casting Network, as well as companies like LIFT and anyone associated with Nims, cheerleading the efforts of the local film and television industry, one has to wonder what's really going on here. Why have all the film equipment 18-wheelers and blocked streets been replaced with construction pickup trucks and lunar terrain roadways if all is supposedly so well?

The largest storm in 30 years annihilated the film biz in New Orleans, but created unprecedented opportunity for other parts of the state. Many in Southeast Louisiana, however, want to know the status of feature filmmaking in the Crescent City. While independent films have flourished since Katrina, big screen—and big budget—productions are slow to return. I asked Alex Schott of the Governor's Office for Film and Television Development, to explain the past, present, and future of Hollywood South. Here are his answers.

**Gary Michael Smith:** Do you think feature film production will return to New Orleans after hurricane season? If so, what impact do you think this will have on Shreveport/Bossier City, Monroe, Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and other venues that gained film productions after Katrina?

**Alex J. Schott:** Feature film production has already returned to New Orleans. *Déjà Vu*, the Bruckheimer/Disney feature directed by Tony Scott, was the first feature to shoot in post-Katrina New Orleans. Since *Déjà Vu*, several other features have based production in the city: *Pride* (Lion's Gate Films), *Fantasia* (Lifetime), *Perfect Day* (LIFT), and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Buttons* (Paramount). If we continue to have a normal hurricane season this year, naturally productions will feel more comfortable locating in south Louisiana during the storm season. The advent of the 2005 hurricane season implemented tremendous growth in select communities throughout our state. This expanded activity has spurred Louisiana to move ahead more quickly by offering a greater array of production services, locations, and infrastructure. It has only benefited Louisiana's reputation as a premiere location for filming.

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**GMS:** Are there plans for revising the incentives packages for filmmakers shooting in Louisiana?

**AJS:** Other states such as Connecticut, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and New York have passed lucrative film incentive programs recently. We are focused on generating permanent economic growth of the entertainment industry. By encouraging post-production, digital FX/animation houses, and film service companies to locate businesses here, we hope to create a continuous entertainment industry presence in Louisiana. Our office continues to monitor the industry presence, and we will continue to work hard to maintain our competitive edge with other states.

**GMS:** According to Michael Hausman during his Master Series Workshops held while "All the King's Men" was filming in New Orleans, postproduction work more than likely will always be performed in Hollywood because that's where editors, producers, and directors live, and they like being able to drive short distances to oversee post work. What do you think Louisiana could do to further develop postproduction facilities for feature films shot in Louisiana?

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**AJS:** While it is true that film editing will most likely continue to be done in Hollywood where the producers, directors, and editors live, much of what happens in post-production requires weeks of preparation by teams of sound, music, and VFX artists before it is ready for the first round of a

director's comments. Also, an increasingly large amount of the post-production process is digital. This means that VFX, sound design, sound FX, base color correction for digital intermediates, and most everything else besides the actual editing of the picture can happen anywhere that has fiber optic cables. Directors and editors can view and comment on the work in about the time it takes to drive from Burbank to Santa Monica. In fact, with post-production facilities in Louisiana establishing alliances with their counter-parts in Hollywood, directors will be able to review all work on mixing stages in Santa Monica, even as it is happening in Louisiana.

Just as there is a healthy post-production industry in Canada, if Louisiana is able to establish a center of excellence for post-production by investing in the infrastructure of the film business, then there will be ample reasons for the film to stay for post while the directors and producers head back to Hollywood.

An example of Louisiana's recruitment potential can be seen in companies like Louisiana Media Services, which is working with local and state government to help train a talented workforce of post production professionals including post supervisors. CEO Jordan Kessler, whose recent post supervisor credits include *The Wicker Man*, *Black Dahlia*, and the soon-to-be-released *Home of the Brave*, recently relocated from Los Angeles to form this company in Louisiana.

**GMS:** While we always are open to working with Hollywood and New York, what do you think are the chances of Louisiana further developing its own film industry with the ability to shoot on "permanent" sound stages; hire local writers, producers, directors, caterers, and others both above- and below-the-line; add music scoring and sound tracks; and conduct all postproduction work in-state on a feature film, Hollywood-type budget capacity (not just independent films)?

**AJS:** Louisiana's below-the-line crew continues to increase according to IATSE membership levels. There is certainly more opportunity for above-the-line careers to develop in Louisiana as native production companies continue to expand. However, the bulk of above-the-line opportunities will continue to take place in locations where films are developed and packaged.

**GMS:** What is the current state of production facilities and sound stage development in and around New Orleans? In the rest of the state?

**AJS: The Nims Center** (<http://www.nimscenter.com/>) recently completed a major phase of remodeling; it now offers [an] ADR/Foley suite, a number of screening rooms, and editing/mixing facilities. In September, the **Louisiana Soundstage** opened in LaPlace (<http://www.louisianasoundstage.com/>).

**LIFT** (<http://www.lift-la.com/>) has major expansion plans into New Orleans as well. Baton Rouge has a number of soundstages in development such as the **Celtic Media Center**, and Baton Rouge also helped attract one of Louisiana's first post-production house[s]—**Louisiana Media Services** (<http://www.louisianamediaservices.com>). **Stageworks** of Shreveport has converted their civic center into a soundstage and production facility (<http://www.stageworksla.com/home.html>). Additionally, the **Louisiana Wave Studio** boasts of the largest wave tank in the lower 48 states [and] is now located in Shreveport.

**GMS:** What did you learn from your film commissions' industry assessment survey?

**AJS:** You learn best practices for operating an effective office in today's marketplace. In order to be successful in an arena of increasing competition, an office must continually evolve and re-evaluate itself on a consistent basis. In the past decade, film offices have entered the world of economic development as more and more states focus on the entertainment industry as a growth sector.

**GMS:** What do you perceive as Louisiana's greatest challenges to being a world-class film producer?

**AJS:** On an international playing field, Louisiana is already considered a premiere location for productions to shoot. However, to maintain the success that we have experienced, we will need to further develop our skilled workforce and infrastructure.

Gary Michael Smith is author of *Movie Extra 101* and of the state proclamation declaring Film and Video Industry Awareness Month for Louisiana for 2005 and 2006. He completed coursework in the Television Video and Film Production MFA program at UNO, and teaches a course at UNO on working in the film and television industry. He maintains a clearinghouse of film- and video-related information on his site at [www.ChatgrisPress.com](http://www.ChatgrisPress.com).

Bayoubuzz Note: We will be engaging in the Interview with Alex Schott at least once per month as we expand the movie industry in Louisiana. If you have any questions you would like answered, we will strongly consider your question during the interview. Just send them to either [Stephen Sabludowsky](#), Publisher or [Gary Michael Smith](#)

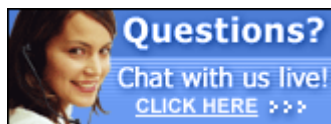
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