



Everything New Orleans

## The Times-Picayune

### Real-life horror tests film industry

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**Gary Michael Smith**

We barely have lights. Cameras have relocated to another parish. And there is not much action in New Orleans, unless you count salvage crews and insurance adjusters.

The city's film industry was doing better than it had at any time in the history of the state -- and was unrivaled throughout the entire country. Then came our test.

With Katrina, everything was taken away from us as if some force was checking our mettle, our resiliency, our ability to rebuild and recoup the world-class film industry we'd worked so hard to develop.

Not only do local film groups now struggle to maintain members, the Louisiana movie industry risks losing the New York and Los Angeles executives who had grown to love working in the state, and in New Orleans in particular.

The Louisiana Institute of Film Technology currently operates from North Louisiana. Its formerly well-attended film industry meet-up group has been hosting gatherings in Shreveport and Baton Rouge. Only recently have the meet-ups returned to New Orleans.

Work continues for some. According to Kelli Bingham, sales and operations manager for the New Orleans office of Panavision, the movie camera distribution firm evacuated with the rest of us on Saturday before the storm. They relocated to Dallas, and currently support filmmaking in Shreveport.

But the curtain may fall for others. As reported recently in The Times-Picayune, Sunset-Gower's 15-acre, \$20 million movie studio in Algiers may never premiere, or at least not in the near future. And damage to Ed Holub's Independent Studios has forced him to move on to other independent media projects.

At this point, the film and entertainment subcommittee, one of the subcommittees of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, is analyzing the economic condition of the New Orleans film industry before the storm and exploring ways to bring back business. But reviving the local industry won't be easy.

Although there are reported to be three productions currently being filmed in New Orleans right now, many film industry people -- including local film crews -- are unlikely to return until upgraded levee protection is in place.

However, the state as a whole still is not only a picturesque shooting location but also possesses a contingent of willing and able crew and talent. And New Orleans continues to offer unmatched cinematic venues.

The New Orleans film industry can make a comeback. But while the Crescent City continues to heal, the rest of the state must take the lead, showing Northeast and West Coast execs that the state is not ready to fade to black and strike the set.

What we in Southeast Louisiana need to remember is that we are one big Louisiana film family. Rivalries are not uncommon in showbiz. Let's not quibble with other parishes that are now picking up business that might otherwise have come here.

They are not trying to take New Orleans' place, but rather are developing their own local trade. They supported us when we were booming. And we can return the favor by providing support and expertise learned from our own growing pains.

Let's keep the cameras rolling in Louisiana -- no matter where the location scouts lead the filmmakers. Eventually, the jobs will return to New Orleans. We all stand to benefit at the closing credits.

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