



Director Richard Foster (right) is filming "So This is Christmas" in Tulsa. It is one of three feature films now being shot in Oklahoma.

JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

Oklahoma takes spotlight

Filmmakers roll cameras on three features

BY MICHAEL SMITH
World Scene Writer

Cameras are rolling on three feature films — two in Tulsa, one in Tahlequah — in northeastern Oklahoma. Filmmakers with local ties and national reputations are hiring cast and crew members from Oklahoma, and they're putting the state — and its growing film industry — in the spotlight.

Filmmakers with all three projects made clear that the Oklahoma Film Enhancement Rebate played a key role in their filming in Oklahoma, rather than seeking out other states with tax rebate programs to benefit their low-budget film projects.

For more

Find more about the three movies currently filming in Oklahoma in Scene. **D1**

The state isn't providing any tax dollars to Hollywood blockbusters; the rebate is 35 percent (37 percent if the work of Oklahoma musicians is used in a film) on in-state expenditures to those companies that qualify, and the fund is capped at \$5 million per year.

In a meeting earlier this month with state officials, Oklahoma Film & Music Office Director Jill Simpson informed lawmakers of the effects of the rebate,



Director Richard Foster (center) goes over the script with his actors Lexi Ainsworth (left) and Bryan Massey during the filming of the movie "So This is Christmas." JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

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which some have scrutinized.

Joseph Henchman, vice president for legal and state projects with the Tax Foundation, told the panel that rebates can result in lost revenue to governments because they don't create enough jobs to balance out the rebate's cost.

The comments came during a meeting of a task force studying tax credits, which will issue recommendations to legislators about which incentives are ineffective and should be eliminated.

Simpson told officials that the six films receiving rebates through the program in the 2012 fiscal year will create a return on investment ratio of 3 to 1, with the \$5 million in rebates being turned into \$15 million in direct dollars being spent in Oklahoma.

Carol Mathews, a Tulsan who has been filming one of the new movies in Okmulgee in recent weeks, provided an example of her project's spending. While the rebate will better her movie's bottom-line, her film shoot pumped dollars into Okmulgee.

"The people here have just



A film crew prepares to film another scene from the movie "So This is Christmas," filmed in Tulsa, on Oct. 18.

JAMES GIBBARD/
Tulsa World

taken us in," Mathews said. "We've got 60 people in our crew, and we were staying in Okmulgee motels and eating in Okmulgee restaurants and shopping at the local Walmart. It's been great for a rural community like this."

The economic impact on Okmulgee was noticed by Community Development Director Dana Sigmon — "When 100 motel rooms are rented out by people who don't live here, that's an impact," she said — but the effect also went beyond dollars and cents.

"When it comes to quality-of-life issues, the people of a town like ours feel good when a motion picture wants to have us as a backdrop for their movie. People here are excited that the name of the

town in the movie is Okmulgee. People would drive around and follow the filming. They would interact with the people. This has been big for us."

While permanent jobs have largely not been created thanks to the rebate, those temporary jobs are often moving from one film location to another in the state, Simpson said — and those jobs have increased from fewer than 300 last year to more than 500 this fiscal year.

"I hope we made a compelling argument that this is good business," Simpson said of the session with legislators.

"We're managing this money so responsibly, and if you do away with the rebate

program, the industry goes away."

She provided two high-profile examples of film work lost recently. In one, a film featuring NBA star Kevin Durant of the Oklahoma City Thunder decided to film in Louisiana because Oklahoma's \$5 million rebate cap had already been committed, she said.

In the second case, a film set in Oklahoma and directed by Steven Spielberg — "Robopocalypse," based on a book by Tulsa native Daniel H. Wilson — had scouts in Oklahoma earlier this year looking at potential film sites. The mega-budget film wouldn't have fit within Oklahoma's rebate cap, but Spielberg's company, Dreamworks, was apparently not concerned with such incentives, Simpson said.

But then, Twentieth Century Fox joined the project as a financial partner. Fox did require shooting in a locale that would offer larger incentives than Oklahoma. So "Robopocalypse" will not film in Oklahoma but in Canada.

Three other films, however, are shooting in the area right now, offering the state a twinkle of Hollywood glitter.

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"So This is Christmas"

Currently shooting in Tulsa and the surrounding area, a drama about troubled teens and the damage they inflict on family and friends before making a positive change in their lives. Tulsan Richard Foster directs Lexi Ainsworth, Eric Roberts and Vivica A. Fox in the picture.

Tax rebates for films

The six films scheduled to receive tax rebates in fiscal year 2012 through the Oklahoma Film Enhancement Rebate are:

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'SO THIS IS CHRISTMAS'

Film shoot: began Oct. 15, for four-plus weeks, in the Tulsa area at sites including Utica Square, Will Rogers High School, the Spotlight Theater and River Parks.

Story: A tale of redemption that follows a teen girl who turns her empty life around and finds meaning by giving back to others.

Talent in front of the camera: The lead character is played by Lexi Ainsworth, an Oklahoma City native and veteran of film and TV who earlier this year was nominated for a Daytime Emmy Award as outstanding young actress for her performances in "General Hospital." Her character is a member of an interesting family mix that includes parents played by film veterans Eric Roberts of "Runaway Train" and "The Dark Knight" and Vivica A. Fox of "Independence Day" and "Kill Bill, Vol. 1." The girl's brother is played by Titus Makin Jr., who appeared in six episodes of "Glee" last season

SEE THIS D3



Director Richard Foster (right) signals his movie crew as actors Lexi Ainsworth and Bryan Massey prepare for the filming of a scene in "So This is Christmas," which is being shot in the Tulsa area. JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

Filmed in Oklahoma

FIO

BY MICHAEL SMITH | WorldScene Writer

Three feature films are currently in production in Oklahoma thanks to the Oklahoma Film Enhancement Rebate. Here's a look at those movies and what the filmmakers have to say about the state's tax rebate program for the film industry.

THIS

FROM D1

as one of the Warblers.

Talent behind the camera: Director Richard Foster, who is also the co-writer and co-producer with his wife Deborah, both from Tulsa. For years Foster was one of the busiest commercial photographers around; he says he shot more than 1,000 commercials for clients like McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Corona, but he and his wife always wanted to make a film and couldn't fit it into their schedule. They made it a priority, and "So This is Christmas" is the result — along with other scripts they've written and hope to produce.

Projected release date: Christmas 2012, with the thought that they will seek theatrical distribution for the film and possibly

shop it through the film festival circuit.

Why make a movie on Oklahoma? "We couldn't have achieved the Anytown, USA, look just anywhere, and there are hundreds of millions of people in America who don't live in New York and Los Angeles who have to overcome things like these characters in the movie," Richard Foster said. "Tulsa is wonderfully photogenic, and the (state) film and music office is so cooperative. Oklahoma is film-friendly, and we don't have to pay a lot of money to close streets to film our shots like in other places."

The importance of the state tax rebate program for films: "We appreciate the advantage of the rebate, obviously, and the state film commission has been invaluable in helping us to use crew members and cast members from the state and help with locations to shoot. It's all going great."