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Cut: Filming impact in Miami-Dade County falls tens of millions

By Scott E. Pacheco

Economic impact of the film industry on Miami-Dade in 2009 is expected to tumble \$10 million to \$20 million after final numbers are tallied, says Jeff Peel, director of the county's film office.

In 2008, the impact totaled about \$130 million, but Mr. Peel said he expects about \$110 million to \$120 million this year.

A major culprit, he says, is Florida's lack of a competitive film incentive. While states like Georgia are offering tax credits of up to 30%, Florida offered \$10.8 million this year — all of which was snapped up the first day, taking many legitimate projects out of the running for even a scrap.

"It's really kind of sad," Mr. Peel said. "It's a business that Florida has done extremely well in in at least the last 50 years."

Miami Beach, Miami and Miami-Dade officials all agree that for now, the film and entertainment industry is not growing.

Robert Parente, director of the Miami film office, said he saw a 20% drop in production days in 2009.

"There are several factors that are keeping it from growing," he said. "The universal reason [is] the global economic meltdown. Certainly the economy in Florida and South Florida is depressed. I think Florida as a whole is in worse shape than other states."

"All the commercials and still shoots are definitely down because budgets have been slashed, marketing budgets have been slashed. [Companies are] making do with stock photography instead of shooting new."

And, he said, "the state film incentive lags woefully behind other states."

Still, about 2,000 companies come to Miami-Dade annually to shoot a movie, television show, commercial or photos. And thousands more have bases set up in the county.

There's "Univision and Telemundo to little mom-and-pop operations — caterers and grip and light companies and camera guys, what have you — lots of small businesses that really are the lifeblood of the economy in South Florida," Mr. Peel said. "If we continue being [minimal] players in the film and entertainment business, those companies are going to have to look elsewhere for their livelihood. If that happens, then our infrastructure starts to go away."

In Miami Beach, about 900 film permits with an impact of about \$32 million were recorded in 2009, a far cry from when Film and Event Production Manager Graham Winick began in the post.

"That's down by 50% in permitting and almost 100% in dollar figures from when I took the job in 2002," he said. "The fashion photography industry has almost evaporated."

He said it has helped to rewrite the rules on reality television, which has allowed shows with very strong, loyal followings such as "Kourtney & Khloe Take Miami" to thrive.

Still, only a strong state funding incentive will make up for overall drops in the numbers.

"Producers are begging us for this," Mr. Winick said. "They basically say, 'Please help us so we don't have to rewrite scripts

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