

Armstrong: Lights, cameras, action, benefits in DeKalb County

The untitled Ramin Bahrani film has moved into part two of its filming schedule and should wrap up by the middle of October. Thousands of excited DeKalb County residents recently lined up at the Egyptian Theatre eagerly awaiting their opportunity to be part of the film thanks to the open casting call for extras needed for the scene that will be filmed at Sycamore Speedway.

That – combined with Superman filming in Sandwich at Valley West Community Hospital and Playboy bunnies from the new NBC TV series showing up at the DeKalb County Courthouse – has created quite a buzz around the county.

Key members of the Bahrani film crew thanked the community for the warm welcome they have received. They told the crowd at the casting call this independent film has a budget of about \$4.5 million as opposed to "Man of Steel," which has an estimated \$180 million budget. They pointed out that hundreds of thousands of their budget dollars have been spent right here in DeKalb County supporting local businesses.

To top it all off, we've had guests from around the world that came to Sycamore last weekend to attend and participate in the Sycamore Film Festival. Our congratulations go out to Shela Lahey, her staff, the "stars" of the "Sycamore" documentary and all the businesses and volunteers that worked tirelessly to bring this spectacular event to DeKalb County. They all deserve to walk the red carpet for shining a spotlight on the wonderful local talent we have in this area, as well as raising money to promote the arts.

The DeKalb County Convention & Visitors Bureau has developed a relationship with the Illinois Film Office so DeKalb County might get more opportunities to be on the short list of places to film in Illinois. Films are given very attractive tax credit incentives, which make filming a movie in Illinois very enticing. It's just good business. The entire state benefits from the DCCVB does.

We also hosted and built itineraries for two tour groups that visited DeKalb County during September. One was a returning group from Lake Forest. Group members had such a positive experience in DeKalb County they wanted to make a return trip.

The new group we worked with was from Del Webb in Huntley. It was the first tour group to visit the Egyptian Theatre after renovations were completed. The new seats got rave reviews.

These groups didn't spend the night, but they brought business and spent money in our restaurants, shops, attractions and one of our local farmers markets. We're already discussing ideas for them to return and explore more of DeKalb County.

My next column will focus on the economic impact tourism dollars had on DeKalb County in 2010. The numbers are encouraging and show we are moving in the right direction even in the challenging economy that we've been faced with for the past three to four years.

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• *Debbie Armstrong is executive director of the DeKalb County Convention & Visitors Bureau.*

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