

Armstrong: Film has helped bring in the money

DeKalb County is the temporary home of movie director Ramin Bahrani, actors Dennis Quaid, Zac Efron, Maika Monroe and Heather Graham and the entire cast and crew of the movie "Heartland" thanks to the efforts of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The bureau was able to land the film because of its knowledge of DeKalb County and the surrounding area, exceptional customer service and the collaborative efforts from other businesses and residents in our service area.

The DCCVB started working with Bahrani and his producer in April to help scout locations that matched his vision for the script he co-wrote with Hallie Elizabeth Newton. Staff members spent days finding locations that he described as we worked to get this feature film for DeKalb County. We were on just about every back road in DeKalb County looking at farms, grain bins, diners, cemeteries, churches and other locations required by the script. The DCCVB stayed in constant contact with them to make sure they knew we wanted them to select DeKalb County as their production headquarters in Illinois.

We learned by email June 29th that we won their business and they wanted to set up shop here for four months. Within 40 minutes, we were asked to book hotel rooms for the next week. This is a perfect example of what the DCCVB contributes to the economic vitality of our local businesses.

Bahrani is an award-winning director and was declared the director of the decade (2000-2010) by film critic Roger Ebert. Born in Winston-Salem, N.C., Bahrani received his bachelor of arts from Columbia University in New York. His first feature film, "Man Push Cart" (2005), premiered at the Venice Film Festival and screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2006. It won more than 10 international prizes and was nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards.

"Heartland" will bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue for area hotels and other local businesses. DCCVB already has booked more than 2,250 hotel room nights for cast and crew through this month. That number should double by the time filming wraps in October.

It's hard to put a dollar amount on the total revenue that is being generated because production has been fast and furious. We estimate at least \$750,000 in additional revenue and sales tax already has been generated as a result of DCCVB landing this film for DeKalb County. The film is employing about 100 cast and crew members and provided work for local residents as crew and extras. Caterers, restaurants, attractions, rental companies, retail shops, grocery stores, gas station and Realtors also have benefited. The economic impact is being felt throughout the county as filming is taking place in many locations throughout DeKalb County.

We know the actors are enjoying local attractions when they have a break from filming. Dennis Quaid has been spotted golfing at local courses. Many of the actors and crew have sampled our local dining fare, shopped and used services that range from massage therapists to DeKalb Taylor Municipal Airport. It all adds dollars to our local economy.

It has been an absolute pleasure to work with the crew and actors to acquaint them with DeKalb County. They have been able to take a few breaks during their 15-hour days. It also has been fun to hear the buzz that this has generated. We've gotten calls from as far away as Springfield from visitors who wanted to book hotel rooms to see if they could get a glimpse of the filming or of an actor.

The DCCVB hopes to develop a "Heartland" tour after the film is released to the general public in 2012, if all goes according to plan.

In the meantime, keep your eyes and ears open. You never know who you'll see eating out, shopping, golfing or jogging in DeKalb County. Check us out at: www.dekalbcountycvb.com or "Like Us" on Facebook at DeKalbCountyCVB1.

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

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