

Set up on Highway 19 for an episode of the TV series *The Dead Zone*



VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH FILM COMMISSION AND...WE'RE ROLLING!

SUBMITTED PHOTO

BY DAVID MORRISON

Albeit kinda late to the party, Susan and I spent many evenings this summer catching up with the “reimagined” *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-09) on DVD. As enjoyable as we found it, an added buzz came from provincial pride in identifying the locations of scenes shot in and around Vancouver. “Ooh, there’s Simon Fraser University/the Orpheum Theatre/The Lions etc.,” we’d chirrup at appropriate moments.

Spotting Vancouver landmarks in movies and TV shows is not unusual, as scores of them have been filmed in the city – a principal “Hollywood North” location. It is after all an attractive setting presenting filmmakers with a dramatic, multi-faceted backdrop. But what about here, over the Strait on this gorgeous hunk o’rock of ours? Do the scenic riches of our island home turn the movie industry on?

To find out more, I recently spoke with Joan Miller, Regional Film Commissioner of Vancouver Island North Film Commission (VINFC), in Campbell River. (An industry professional of global repute, Miller also holds the Vice Presidency of the Association of Film Commissioners International.)

Due to understandably watertight confidentiality agreements with clients, Miller was not permitted to reveal too much – just tantalizing snippets of information – but in respect of what was occurring on the day of our conversation, she told me:

“As of today there are three projects ‘in camera’. We’re doing some commercial work with Subaru, who were out in Tofino yesterday and will be in the region for the next two days. There’s also some footage being shot that is to do with, and will be shown during, the Winter Olympics. There’s also some feature film work going on.”

One of the projects Miller will have been previously sworn to secrecy on is the second instalment of what looks set to become an enormously successful franchise. Based on the books of Stephanie Meyer, the *Twilight* Saga is already a cultural phenomenon that has made a vampiric megastar of its leading man, Robert “R-Pattz” Pattinson. The hotly anticipated next film, *New Moon*, is to be released worldwide on November 20 – and the world will enjoy glimpses of our west coast, as scenes were captured around Incinerator Rock on Tofino’s Long Beach. *Eclipse*, the third of the series, is already underway in Vancouver, but some visual

effect filming also took place near Nanaimo in September. Although no actors were involved, the city was abuzz amid tight security at the location.

As it developed into something of an obsession for us by Season 3, I hoped to join some dots when asking Miller if the VINFC had any involvement whatsoever in the production of *Battlestar Galactica*. My hopes were crushed, but she did tell me of another major TV series project in 2006 that presented unique challenges for her organization.

“We did a full episode of *The Dead Zone*,” she said, referring to *Independence Day* from Season 5. “We were able to close the inland Island Highway, as they had a whole episode featuring a highway crash.” The highway was actually closed for a full week, so it was quite the logistical operation for Miller and her team.

Nonetheless, the Film Commissioner is very keen to repeat this kind of experience as often as possible, hoping for entire productions to be filmed on her territory. (Encompassing everywhere between Nanaimo and Cape Scott, plus the Powell River Regional District, it’s quite some location portfolio on offer, wouldn’t you say?)

“One of our goals is to land one of those episodic television series’ here, where they’re shooting in our region full-time,” Miller said, “because that also helps us to build our local crew.”

Such a situation, with a successful show like *The Dead Zone* set in our backyard, would of course be greatly beneficial not only to the ongoing development of our domestic Island film industry – the goals at the core of VINFC’s work – but also to the economies of the communities in question. Imagine the pilgrimages to this area from far and wide if a production created here was a smash hit: it could only be good news all round.

On call 24-7 to an international entertainment industry that never sleeps, the tireless Miller is an extremely busy woman with a very involved job of work to do. The grand irony is, however, that her hours dictate she rarely gets the opportunity to sample examples of the end product.

“I don’t have time to watch much television and I don’t get to see a lot of movies,” she said. “Our days are long here...and we just keep going!” Oh, you must find the time to watch *Battlestar*, *Joan* – I’ll lend you the DVDs, if you like. ~

For further information please call Vancouver Island North Film Commission at (250) 287-2772, email film.info@infilm.ca or visit their website: www.infilm.ca