



Who Runs the (FILM) World?

Written by Vanessa Ulm, Executive Director, Edmonson County Tourism Commission and Commissioner in SOKY Film Commission

You may have heard the old adage declaring that “women get things done.” Well, it’s right.

Assemble a group of intelligent, dynamic, and tenacious women and watch the magic unfold as they take a vision and mold it into fruition. This is just the case with the successful and ever-growing Southern Kentucky Film Commission (SOKY Film), which is an all-female commission composed of the Executive Directors at the helm of ten tourism commissions throughout southern Kentucky.

The Southern Kentucky Film Commission was born in 2017 after Hollywood actor and stuntman Branscombe Richmond advised the Hart County Judge Executive’s office of the state’s recently-instituted film incentive program. Offering a competitive advantage for filmmakers seeking tax credits and incentives, the Kentucky Entertainment Incentive Program was enticing bait. In order for the film commission to prove viable and successful there needed to be boots on the ground, first to create the commission from scratch and then to manage it into a thriving organization.

Spearheading the development of the Southern Kentucky Film Commission involved five tourism commissions and has now blossomed into ten female-run tourism commissions eager to prove instrumental in garnering interest and driving films to the southern Kentucky region. Each share the enthusiasm of showcasing their community’s assets to market the southern-Kentucky region as a movie industry magnet.

Southern Kentucky Film Commission is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to making the business of filmmaking easier. It serves as a liaison with the local communities that assist in making connections and finding the services and resources needed to make each project a success. And nobody knows the local communities, business leaders, and how to serve up success better than the woman at the helm of SOKY Film. Southern Kentucky is one of the most expansive and scenic back lots offered in the state; if you need it, the women of SOKY Film will find it.

Over ten productions have utilized the SOKY Film region, bringing in an astounding five million dollars in economic impact. These productions travel into town with professional crews that

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engage in local services through lodging, dining, shopping, and generally exploring the area during downtime from the set. While the economic impact on the local community is noteworthy, these productions also afford a level of excitement and curiosity to the locals. And what is a movie without extras? Many times, extras are referred to as “background” and without the subtle hustle and bustle taking place behind the main actors, the scene appears devoid of authenticity. When “background” is requested, a call to action is released for local residents to live out their movie star fantasies. This is an exciting opportunity for local residents to experience firsthand the behind-the-scenes secrets of breathing vibrant life into a script.

The women at the forefront of this women-run commission partner seamlessly to identify opportunities to invest in their local communities and contribute to the growth of the economy in southern Kentucky. The camaraderie between the women on the SOKY Film Board of Directors is a beautiful partnership, as what many might assume is a competitive race to secure a filming location in their community, is actually a celebration for the commission benefitting as a whole when a production chooses any location within the SOKY Film Commission region. It is common for the production crew to choose multiple locations across the region for one movie, affording multiple communities to benefit at a time.

Southern Kentucky Film Commission President Coni Shepperd said, “It is an honor to work with these ladies. They all love the cities and counties that they are from and represent and are passionate about film. They love for people to come to their area and see the beauty and hospitality offered and find it a pleasure to help filmmakers make their dream come true.”

“I am proud to work in tandem with the SOKY Film Commission because it is an all-female crew,” said Executive Producer of SOKY Film Commission, Branscombe Richmond. “They are diligently and continuously working hard to bring projects to the southern Kentucky region, and therefore it is growing leaps and bounds. I am happy to be a part of their success.”

We adamantly declare that the women of the Southern Kentucky Film Commission are truly a powerhouse in the filming industry.

The tourism commissions currently partners in the Southern Kentucky Film Commission are Munfordville (Coni Shepperd, President), Oak Grove/Christian County (Traci Cunningham, Vice President), Cave City (Jennifer McNett, Treasurer), Horse Cave/Hart County (Sandra Wilson, Secretary), Glasgow/Barren County (MacLean Lessenberry), Franklin/Simpson County (Amy Ellis), Bowling Green (Sherry Murphy), Edmonson County (Vanessa Ulm), Shelby County (Janette Marson), and Bardstown (Samantha Brady).

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