

Development of Film and TV Industry Urgently Needed in Southwestern Ontario
Key industry stakeholders join forces to call for funding and support for the region

Key stakeholders in the film and television industry are collaborating on a new initiative that will spur the production of screen-based content in Southwestern Ontario. The Southwestern Ontario Film Alliance (SOFA) (www.sofa-film.ca) has been established to work with funding agencies and various levels of government to provide the incentives to attract productions to the region and to help develop homegrown talent and skills.

Founding supporters of the not-for-profit organization include ACTRA Toronto, IATSE Local 357, London's Forest City Film Festival, the Toronto Writers' Collective, Sim, Sheridan College Screen Industry Research and Training Centre and a number of production companies with ties to the region including Jonsworth Productions, 519 Films and Ballinran Entertainment.

"SOFA has been in the works for some time but was accelerated because of the pandemic and the loss of jobs in the arts and culture sector," says Craig Thompson, President of Ballinran, the Stratford-based production company. "The film and television sector has a huge economic impact in Ontario and pent-up demand for content plus the impact of COVID-19 has created an urgent need to spread jobs, training and infrastructure to other areas of the province not currently benefiting from the boom in this sector."

While Southwestern Ontario has great filming locations in close proximity to the Greater Toronto Area, current incentives do not cover the added expenditures for travel, accommodation and other hospitality costs, so SOFA is advocating for measures such as enhanced regional tax credits, subsidies to support the tourism sector, programs to develop infrastructure and skills development programs as well as a regional film office and a creative production hub.

"This is about job creation, job retention and job retraining," says Mark Card, President of IATSE Local 357, the union that represents creative and technical backstage staff at the Stratford Festival and other live performance venues in Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph and surrounding areas. "It's a short jump from stage to screen and our members have skills in both areas and are ready and available to work."

That cross-over between stage and screen also applies to the many actors who live and work in Southwestern Ontario, which is why ACTRA Toronto supports the move to develop the film and television industry in the region.

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Southwestern Ontario Film Alliance

“ACTRA Toronto is proud to partner with the Southwestern Ontario Film Alliance to help build and promote the region, long known for its successful theatre productions, as a thriving location for film and television production,” says Theresa Tova, President of ACTRA Toronto. “We look forward to working with community and industry partners to reach audiences around the world with Southwestern Ontario’s talent in front of and behind the camera.”

Building a sustainable future for the sector depends on production resources which is why Sim, one of the leading players in North America’s film and television industry, has the region on its radar. As a first step towards developing the industry, Sim is planting a flag in the region by supplying equipment targeting the needs of Stratford-based emerging filmmakers.

“We believe Southwestern Ontario is the natural next step for the expansion of film and television production in this province,” says Wendy Moss, VP Business Development and Production for Canada. “Stratford, with its renowned arts and culture brand and its geographic location, make it the ideal place to plant the seeds for the film and television industry.”

The Southwestern Ontario Film Alliance is also creating a network to connect a diverse cross-section of filmmakers, production companies as well as First Nations and Métis content creators and is reaching out to anyone with an interest in the film and television industry to sign-up for updates by visiting the alliance website: sofa-film.ca

Southwestern Ontario is the region west of the Greater Toronto area extending down to the Windsor-Detroit border and bounded by Lake Erie to the south and Lake Huron to the north.

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