

Cap U gets \$30 million for film centre

Upgrade to boost local jobs, say supporters; some independent producers skeptical.

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STAFF REPORTER

Capilano University will have an upgraded film centre, with provincial and federal governments kicking in a combined \$30.2 million to fund Phase 1 of the overhaul to the school's Motion Picture Arts program.

With the funding – part of a \$2-billion Knowledge Infrastructure initiative by the federal government to upgrade Canadian colleges and universities – Cap U expects to break ground on a new film centre building this January, says Dr. Greg Lee, university president and vice-chancellor.

Lee says the new building is a welcome upgrade to the “very bad facilities,” a 40-year-old portable that currently houses the film program.

Announced last week by North Van Conservative MP Andrew Saxton and North Shore MLAs, the new film centre investment could “put North Vancouver on the map for motion picture arts and film studies,” said Saxton in an interview.

“We would like to make a whole new generation of independent filmmakers,” said Lee, adding that the university, some local film businesses and the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce flagged North Shore film production as a key infrastructure spending project for governments after a summit held last January.

“Our goal is to drive domestic filmmaking, to try to get a domestic industry that's not dependent on external funding,” said Lee.

Once in Phase 2, the program could see enrollments increase from 300 to 400 students, he said.

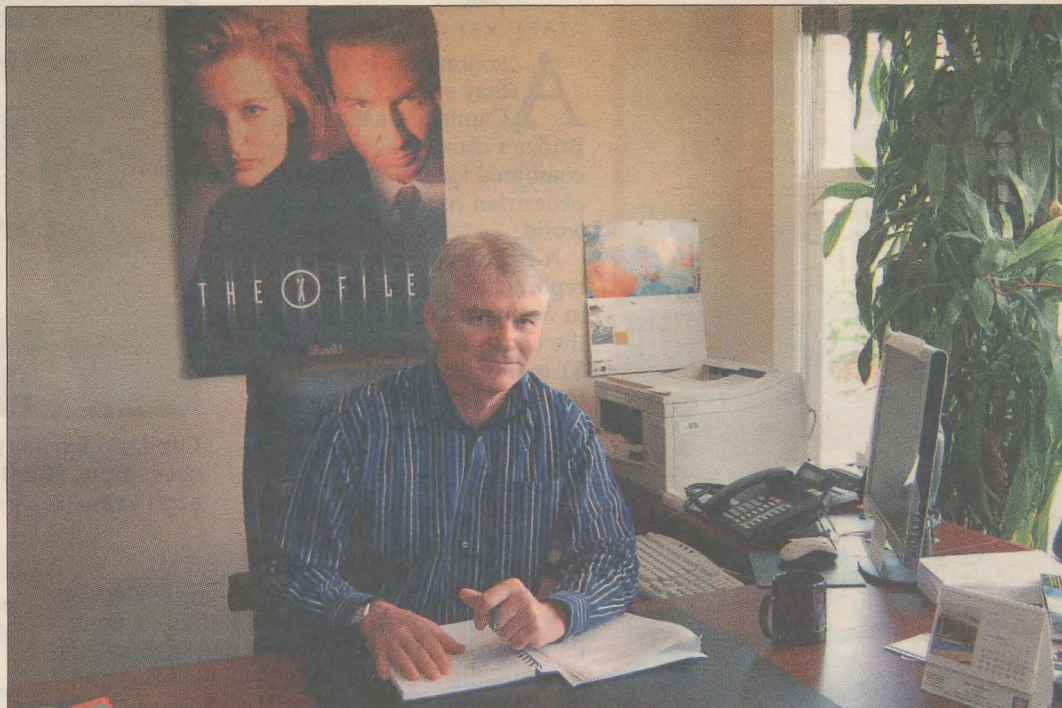
The Vancouver Film School reports it graduates 1,300 students every year. The B.C. Film Commission reports about 18 more film programs in the Vancouver area.

In an interview with *The Outlook*, Peter Leitch, president of North Shore and Mammoth studios, said the Cap U program could be a “great pillar” for local entertainment industries.

“It's really showing leadership in terms of developing an industry that has really great potential for the future – and that's going to be a key component for the success of the industry going forward,” Leitch said, estimating that currently 5,000 local workers are employed in film projects on the North Shore.

He said 10 years from now he hopes to see 10,000 people “employed in the whole digital entertainment sector.”

However some independent producers working in the Vancouver area are skeptical



ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY - Peter Leitch, president of North Shore and Mammoth studios, believes the Cap U program could be a 'great pillar' for the local entertainment industries.

File photo

about the impact of a new film program on the industry.

“I don't think there's a shortage of people. I think there's a shortage of work,” said Christian Allen, producer with The Capital Media Company in Vancouver.

“I don't know if there's space, to be honest,” he said of the call for more young talent in Vancouver's film business. “I think there are people leaving the business.”

Another independent producer cited a tough road for young people getting started in local film and television.

David Bouck with Vancouver's Means of Production said “If I had \$30,000 to go to film school, I'd take the money and I'd make my own film.”

He said most technical jobs in film require new recruits to “start at the bottom – and you hump gear and you gradually learn the trade that way,” adding that “maybe one in 10,000” film school grads goes straight to directing within the first year.

Representatives from IATSE Local 891 and ACFC West Local 2020 CEP, unions representing film and television workers in

the area, did not respond by *Outlook* press time.

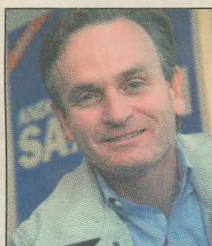
Peter Leitch argued that a deeper pool of skilled talent in the film industry could draw more business to Vancouver and the North Shore.

He said Vancouver's strength in the gaming sector, coupled with the film business here, could position the area for a congregation of “talent and infrastructure.”

He predicted proliferated production centres will be replaced by entertainment sector mega-hubs, “growing sort of like Silicon Valley grew in California.”

“You can be working on a game in the morning and you can be working on a film in the afternoon in terms of visual effects, motion capture and all that,” Leitch said. “In other words, the best people in the industry are right here, are local, and North Vancouver I think can play an important role with Capilano University.”

According to the B.C. Film Commission, the province saw \$1 billion in production spending in 2008, with 250 motion picture projects. The commission estimates the crew base in the province to be 30,000.



MP Andrew Saxton