

Lights, camera, action: film production resumes in Manitoba

Kayla Rosen | July 14, 2020



WINNIPEG -- Manitoba's film industry is officially back in action, after halting productions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Rachel Rusen, Manitoba film commissioner and CEO of Manitoba Film and Music, the province's low case numbers have made it possible for the industry to resume operations - granted it follows the necessary public health restrictions.

The first productions that are getting back to work are documentaries and TV movies, as they require smaller crews.

"This enables our Manitoba producers to implement the new protocols and have our Manitoba crews adapt to them first before scaling up to larger productions," Rusen said in a statement.

As of last week, there were six shows in production in Manitoba, though two of these were feature animations that continued working throughout the pandemic.

Rusen noted some of the documentaries that have returned to production include: Science Fiction Makers, Dying to be Famous, and March of the Polar Bears.

Last Wednesday, July 8, marked the first day that crews started filming live-action scripted productions since the start of the pandemic, with the TV movie, called 'A Secret to Keep.'

Rusen said there were also three projects in pre-production, also known as prep, last week.

"During prep is when a production office is opened; crews are hired; schedules are made; actors are cast; locations are scouted, permits obtained, equipment ordered, the costume department designs and

builds wardrobe, the art department develops the look of the show that includes sets and props along with building any necessary sets," she said.

Two of these projects are made-for-TV movies that will begin filming this week, and a feature film that is in prep for the summer.

HOW THE FILM INDUSTRY IS ADAPTING

Rusen said that even though things are resuming, the film industry has had to make adjustments. This includes hiring additional cleaners, bringing in health monitors for temperature checks, changing meal distribution plans, and limiting access to sets.

"Social distancing means shooting will likely take longer and that costs more; however that is the cost of being safe and being able to resume work," she said. "The Manitoba film industry is committed to a safe and responsible return to production."

Producer Cary Davies with Van Evera Productions, the company producing 'A Secret to Keep' along with production partner Neshama, said the biggest challenge was planning out how they would return for their first day of filming, because they managed to complete their prep while working from home.

"We drafted a set of protocols for working on set and shared this with all the different departments to get their input along with a registered nurse whom has extensive experience in a number of specialties including management of Intensive Care Units," he said in a statement, noting that after a couple days of shooting things were going smoothly with the safety plan on set.

Davies added the COVID-19 pandemic has had a financial impact on the industry, as the public health protocols have created added costs.

"The biggest impact has been somewhat financially as these protocols do lead to significant extra expenses compared to pre-COVID filming," he said.

"We all care a great deal about coming back to work safely and I'm happy that my partners in producing this project all came to the table to ensure we did so correctly."

Arnie Zipursky, co-founder and producer for Neshama Entertainment ULC, said an "enormous" amount of thought and time has gone into what a safe set will look like.

"Manitoba has led Canada and our industry to be one of the safest locations in the world as the production community now commences since the pandemic shut down," he said. ■