

SHOOT ALBERTA

by Rossy Cameron

Cinema Canada is happy to welcome Rossy Cameron as our Alberta correspondent. She has a strong background in both journalism and film, having worked on her own documentary productions and for the CBC and the National Film Board of Canada. Ms. Cameron can be reached at 403-453-2980.

Alberta's new Minister of Culture, Greg Stevens has fired off a clear message to the province's filmmakers: if he is to help the province's film industry, industry people had better mobilize and give him some ammunition with which to sell his cabinet colleagues and the public.

Stevens says that during a time of cutbacks, when social services have been slashed, hospital beds shut down and teachers on the warpath over cuts, it is pretty tough to convince anyone that filmmakers, whom he thinks are perceived by the public as the 'tuxedo crowd', should get funds no one else can get their mitts on.

The province is still hauling itself out of its latest recession and is in a firm deficit-fighting stance. It is going to take some fancy footwork to show that supporting the labor-intensive film industry could be beneficial to the economy in the long run.

Stevens strongly opposes the use of the province's uncommitted lottery dollars for deficit reduction (there are varying figures of anywhere up to \$130 million in surplus funds). The

existing policy has seen lottery-funded foundations supporting Culture's grants programs, many of which have been severely cut.

Allen Stein, president of AMPIA (Alberta Motion Picture Industry Association) would like to see a film foundation created for pre-production development and for the support of talented filmmakers.

Albertans buy more film tickets and books per capita than anywhere else in Canada and the province has a large pool of prolific artists but culture, in any shape or form, is not a favorite child with this government and takes a back seat. Actually, in Premier Don Getty's government, Alberta Culture has been so decimated it is lucky if it even gets to go along for the ride.

Stevens, who was born in Toronto and raised in Winnipeg, is an engineer. The former Banff town manager and Royal Canadian Air Force fighter pilot has held one other portfolio, that of Personnel Administration minister. He readily admits to being somewhat unfamiliar with his new constituency, particularly the film community. He is very personable and enthusiastic about his new job. To give him his due, he is meeting and listening to his staff and has been run almost ragged trying to meet members of his cultural constituency. That in itself is a refreshing change from his predecessor whose blatant disinterest thoroughly discouraged the cultural community. Stevens, on the other hand says "If

we don't give the nod to Alberta talent those people will go elsewhere."

Besides unfamiliarity and an obdurate cabinet the new minister has other handicaps: a coordinated film policy is nonexistent; unlike other provinces, where filmmaking comes under one umbrella, in Alberta the responsibility is scattered throughout a number of government departments, and, not the least of his problems, the film industry itself is fragmented.

According to Stein, there have been efforts to get a strong voice to represent the province's filmmakers, but to no avail. The ongoing argument as to whether film is a cultural industry or an economic industry has served to keep all concerned at loggerheads.

Ironically, under Peter Lougheed's reign Alberta was the first province to recognize the film industry as a potentially strong cultural and economic industry.

The story has it that, while he was in China, Lougheed saw a film that depicted Alberta people and products and it excited him that Alberta stories could be told internationally as well as locally and nationally. On the basis of this experience he fully endorsed the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation (AMPDC).

The AMPDC was the first provincial film development fund in the country and still is the only such organization that supports non-theatrical as well as theatrical films. However, the province has neglected to keep up with changing needs. Unlike other provincial development corporations, AMPDC still does

not have an equity component to their mandate. The president of the corporation, Lorne McPherson, has vociferously worked towards an equity fund and the film community hopes to see one in place this fall.

Coincidentally (or more likely politically), the AMPDC was located in Canmore which is in the new minister's riding of Banff/Cochrane. In their eagerness to diversify government offices, the bureaucrats neglected to consider that placing the office in a town near the mountains might provide wondrous scenic splendor but absolutely no accessibility to those requiring its services. However, after much pressure, this silliness has been rectified as the AMPDC was moved to Edmonton at the beginning of November. Stevens says that as MLA for the riding he regrets the move and the loss of four jobs, but as the minister of Culture he understands and endorses it.

The AMPDC comes under the jurisdiction of the Department of Economic Development and Trade. The film branch in this department has a fairly healthy budget. One of its main functions is to attract foreign film productions to the province. Director of the branch, Bill Marsden, says he has had to turn away productions because of a shortage in the labour pool. However, he is anticipating heightened activity in both local and foreign productions when the Allarcom Studios in Edmonton and the IBC Studios in Calgary come on stream.

Stevens' own Film and Literary Arts Branch has an embarrassingly small budget of about \$50,000 for small film grants and support to film organiza-

tions. Trying to spread this piffling amount equitably among Alberta filmmakers takes some fancy stick handling by director Ruth Bertelsen Fraser. The pressure on her might be less tense were she not quite so committed to the film community, but then it is this very commitment that endears her to the scriptwriters and filmmakers of the province.

The new minister could do a lot worse than to take a leaf from Bertelsen-Fraser's book. As the sceptical Stein says, if Greg Stevens is perceived to care about Canadian culture and, ultimately, Alberta stories and those who write and film them, he could gain a lot of mileage with his film community, even if he loses most of his battles in cabinet. A real commitment would go a long way to restoring the damaged trust and respect for Alberta Culture.

But Alberta filmmakers have to give him something to do battle with.

Toth to AMPDC

CANMORE — Garry S. Toth has been appointed executive-project administration and public relations of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation.

The appointment was made recently by Lorne MacPherson, president of the AMPDC.

Toth will be directly responsible for the AMPDC project loan application process, producer/project status reporting and AMPDC communication needs. He is an independent film and television producer with nine years experience.

Toth replaces Caryl Brandt.

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