



ESPN



MLS  
MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER

Winner Communications — ESPN Major League Soccer

# Oklahoma

by Jennifer Willis

**M**ention Oklahoma, and immediate stock images spring to mind. Home of the Cherokee Nation. The American Heartland. Last year's tragic Oklahoma City bombing. But as the film and video industry is discovering this great resource in the Midwest, more and more production companies are changing their tune to 'Oklahoma! OK!'

The big news of 1996 for Oklahoma thus far has to be Steven Spielberg's *Twister*, says Bud Elder of the Oklahoma Film Commission. May 15th will find the world premiere of the film in Oklahoma as a benefit for the Red Cross. And such opportunities open many new doors.

Elder says that a big push in the area comes at the hands of Lieutenant Governor Mary Fallin. Under this new political leadership, explains Elder, Oklahoma is sending the message "that we're interested, we're capable, and we're available."

The Film Commission, which first opened its doors fourteen years ago, is now guided by the experienced hand of Robert Davis, an Emmy Award-winning producer and director who has spent years in the industry and knows the Hollywood community well.

The new administration took office on November 1st of last year, and Elder says that "our phones never stop ringing." He explains that production has increased pretty much everywhere, and Oklahoma is no exception. Elder is confident that 1996 will surpass 1995 in attracting production to the area.

The Film Commission operates out of two offices, located in Tulsa and Oklahoma city. While the two locations are one hundred miles apart, Elder says that they work very well together — if one office is not able to find a particular location for a prospective production, chances are the other is able to.

"We're thinking big," says Elder, who mentions that the Oklahoma Film Commission is currently exploring a cooperative effort with neighboring states to develop a comprehensive listing of the talent pool available.

Another new feature for the Commission involves the participation of two well-known Hollywood professionals in area development. Both Jim Baker and Oscar-winner Grey Frederickson have recently agreed to serve on the commission, flying into the area at

the own expense to lend their expertise to the effort.

A big selling point for Oklahoma is a good economy. After *Twister* finished shooting, for instance, Elder noticed that many crew people and other personnel were buying cars and appliances before leaving the area, since prices were so much lower. Elder also explains that Oklahoma as a rule requires no permits for production, and that a very capable talent base is available at reasonable cost.

Oklahomans look on film and video production as any other industry, so while there is excitement in having media projects come to town, there is also a healthy financial interest behind the warm welcome. Communities are very receptive to location shoots and do their best to encourage production in the state, and Elder points out that Oklahoma can provide just about any look necessary for a production — from forests and mountains to wide open plains, and from busy metropolitan areas to 'stark nothingness'.

And production companies have not been shy about taking advantage of Oklahoma resources. The area has hosted past productions such as *Rain Man* and *Ambush at Waco*, provided locations for HBO's *Public Enemy* (aired in April), and will welcome *Eye of God*, an independent film starring Hal Holbrook set to begin work this summer. As Oklahoma continues to attract such national attention, says Elder, "we can claim our share."

But Oklahoma has more to offer than just its great locations. Area production companies are attracting their own attention.

There is a "nice balance here," says Winner Communication's Director of Graphics and Sales, Dan Maras. This Tulsa facility has diversified its services into three areas — programming, postproduction, and high-end graphics — which keeps production running at a fairly constant pace throughout the year.

Maras has been with the fifteen-year-old company for ten years and plays an active role managing graphics projects as well as working in sales. This diversity within his own role allows him stay in touch with the production end and helps him to ensure a greater depth of service to his clients.

When asked about the name of the company, Maras says that it

*continued next page*

