



BY CHERYL BINNING

A movie poster for the American film *Up River* hangs on the wall behind Crawford Hawkins' desk. While the 1980 western isn't well known to many people, it holds significant meaning for Hawkins, the executive director of the Directors Guild of Canada B.C. District Council.

Then an L.A.-based producer, Hawkins visited B.C. for the first time to shoot *Up River*. And the movie played a big role in his decision to move to the province in 1983. "I met my wife on the set of that movie – she did costumes," reminisces Hawkins.

And the Brooklyn native has been a fixture in the B.C. industry ever since. He's run local post houses, worked as a post-production supervisor and second unit director, and sat on the boards of numerous film and TV organizations.

ET CETERA...

- First job in the industry was in 1957, sweeping the editing room floor as an apprentice at a New York City commercial production company. He went on to become an editor and assistant director in the TV commercial world in New York, Chicago and L.A.
- Worked as a post-production supervisor and second unit on the B.C.-shot series *Neon Rider* and *Black Stallion*
- Got his Canadian citizenship in 1994
- Received a primetime Emmy for sound editing for *The X-Files*
- Hobbies include camping and sailing

At age 75, Hawkins shows no signs of slowing down, or retiring from the industry. He's in his seventh year at the helm of the DGC BC, and also continues to work on indie movies (*Alien Trespass* and *Battle in Seattle* are among his recent credits).

"I am not very good at golf. I hate gardening," he says with a chuckle. "I love working. I wouldn't know what else to do."

The highest priority on Hawkins' agenda in his role at DGC BC is convincing American studios and producers to shoot in Vancouver, in order to provide work for his membership and the industry overall.

With the lower loonie and a lucrative B.C. tax credit, that job isn't too difficult this spring. "We are optimistic," says Hawkins. "So far this year overall production levels are ahead of 2007."

Also helping B.C.'s chances of landing American work is the fact that some of the shine has dimmed on American tax-credit states. Incentive money has dried up or been reduced in some states, and there is a recognition that the savings may be negated by other costs.

"Even *Ugly Betty* called [about moving to Vancouver from New York] earlier this year when they thought they might lose their tax credit – although that didn't last long," notes Hawkins. "And in some U.S. cities you have to fly equipment and crew in, so all of a sudden what looks like a good credit evaporates in your face."

B.C.'s movie slate is strong, he says, pointing to the \$300-million Disney film *Tron 2*, which is currently shooting, as well as the two back-to-back sequels to the phenomenally successful *Twilight* franchise. On the TV front, the Fox series *Fringe* has moved shooting from New York to Vancouver and just opened its production office.

But Hawkins is concerned that there are fewer TV series shooting than at this time last year. "TV series are our lifeblood," he explains. "They are traditionally the big employers and provide long-term work."

B.C. saw an increased number of pilots shoot in the province this spring, but Hawkins isn't celebrating yet. Pilot announcements take place in early May, so it will be a question of whether these shows are picked up. The recession has led to cutbacks at studios and this may impact their decisions, he points out.

BACKPAGE

HAWKINS: B.C.'S TIRELESS AMBASSADOR

"NBC, for example, is not running any drama from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m. this fall, so there's five shows gone this year," says Hawkins, referring to Jay Leno's new show that will fill the primetime slot. "So we are waiting to see how many drama series are picked up or if they are replaced by cheaper reality shows."

If pilots go ahead, working in B.C.'s favor (beyond the tax credit and exchange rate) is the fact that diverse locations are available within close proximity, which ultimately saves money.

"When you shoot in New York or L.A., you can't get away from the same city look without spending a lot of money traveling," he explains. "When we did *X-Files* here, our highest budget was \$2.8 million per episode, but when they moved to L.A., they couldn't keep it under \$4 million because of all the location travel costs."

The unions in B.C. also do their best to be flexible to the needs of various productions.

"All our collective agreements here have an enabling clause, so producers can come to us and say that to bring their work here they need concessions in the contract," explains Hawkins.

It's a tough balancing act – meeting studio demands and getting the best deal for the locals working in the industry. For example, DGC BC is currently negotiating a new three-year collective agreement with the U.S. studios and the CFTPA. Hawkins notes that the upcoming wage negotiations will have to take into account the recession and financial crunch at the studios.

"In the past we have always stayed ahead of inflation [in negotiating rates], but if we push too hard we could be the highest-rated guys in the unemployment line," says Hawkins. "The estimators in L.A. look at our dollar as well as our wage rates to determine if we are too expensive a place to shoot or not."

Looking ahead, another issue in play that could impact production is the 2010 Winter Olympics. "The big concern is from February to the end of March it will be difficult to shoot downtown and to secure high-end hotel rooms for A-list talent in town shooting movies," explains Hawkins.

Like the rest of the country, a constant unknown facing the B.C. industry is the fluctuation in the Canadian dollar. "If the dollar went to par this fall, it wouldn't impact production immediately," says Hawkins. "The big features and TV series would have bought their money forward [locked in a currency rate] because they can afford to do so. It would, however, affect the decisions made as to where they shoot their films the following spring."

Even though he can't control the dollar, the Olympics or competition from U.S. states, Hawkins has a few other tricks up his sleeve when it comes to luring his American neighbors to B.C.

"My good looks and sparkling personality," he jokes. "I have been around a long time and have a lot of experience, familiarity and friendships with the people we deal with on an ongoing basis. In this business people buy from their friends. Everything is too time sensitive to take chances on new suppliers." •