

GREECE IS THE WORD

Commission tries to lure back filmmakers

By **BASHIRAH MUTTALIB**

Greece has rid itself of the yoke of socialism and renewed its relationship with the world of filmmaking. This was the message of Minister of Tourism Dimitris Avramopoulos to the film community at a recent BevHills Hotel reception.

Seeking to build on a moviemaking era that produced pics such as "Boy on a Dolphin" and convinced filmgoers that Anthony Quinn was Greek, the minister encouraged filmmakers, "Film your myth in Greece." Referring to features such as "The Bourne Identity" and "Lara Croft Tomb Raider," Avramopoulos cited the beauty of Greek locations and its multilingual film crews.

To make this more than just another pitch, Greece is establishing a film commission, in addition to an L.A. office, to assist in the facilitating of production.

Agreements will vary depending on the project, but enticements include a value-added tax reimbursement of 8%-18%; a 12% return on labor costs; assistance of the country's armed forces; special deals on accommodations and transportation; and simplification of the permitting process.

To that end, permissions denied by the old regime have been cleared through the office of the now more open minister of culture for filming at archeological sites. Productions taking advantage of this access will include Warner Bros., Atmosphere Entertainment MM and Hollywood Gang Prods.' re-creation of the Persian-Greco war in their adaptation "300," as well as Brit pic "The Water Carrier," set to shoot later this year.

Plans also are in the works for the building of four soundstages, including one bigger than the 007 stage at Pinewood, and the construction of the largest water tank for filmmaking in Europe. Soundstages are in short supply at present, but Greece will offer up its airplane hangars as well as facilities from last year's Olympics to fill the gap.

"It's a filmmaker's job to make films — our job is to help them," said Avramopoulos. "To do this, we

will adapt legislation to the needs of the film industry: Adjust, adapt and update. We are determined to put Greece back on the minds of the film community as it was 30 years ago."

Los Angeles Center Studios, below, has enhanced its diverse campus community, having inked six new long-term tenants for its 20-acre downtown location.

"We are succeeding in our vision to create a resort hotel for the entertainment industry supplemented by creative office space and providing a supportive, synergistic environment for the growing independent elements of the entertainment business," said Sam Nicassio, president of LACS.

The production companies, utilizing 31,000 square feet, include Maya Cinemas (theater circuit)/Esparza-Katz Prods. ("Gods and Generals," "Introducing Dorothy Dandridge"), AMP Filmworks (rental equipment), Delfino Entertainment (film production, financing, marketing and distribution), Enterprise Rent-a-Car's entertainment division (production services), Gutz Film (production/post-production) and Hollywood Paws (animal actors agency).

LACS has garnered a solid production resume with pics such as "The Aviator," "Constantine," "In Good Company," "Catch Me if You Can" and the upcoming "Fun With

Dick and Jane" having lensed wholly or in part at the studio.

Commercial production is in full swing, including small-screen fare such as "24," "Alias," "CSI: Las Vegas," "CSI: Miami," "Monk," CBS' "Numbers" and the WB's "Blue Collar TV."

The campus boasts a diverse mix — "a honeycomb of entertainment interests working collectively in a single campus environment" that, in addition to its six 18,000-square-

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foot soundstages, 450,000 square feet of short- and long-term office

space, has amenities allowing it to host special events accommodating 100 to 10,000 people, ranging from a Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger town hall meeting to a screening of "The Aviator."

Productions in need of a "Blues Brothers" blowout finale can wreak havoc on the Wonderland Mall in Livonia, Mich., near Detroit. The mall, renovated in 1995 and skedded to be razed for new development in the spring or early summer, is a million-square-foot enclosed facility with a surrounding parking lot available for production — or destruction.

Wonderland is fully functional with fixtures and storefronts in place. Interested production companies can contact Robert Schostak Bros. & Co. at schostar@schostak.com or Brad Waisbren at waisbren@earthlink.net.



Los Angeles Center Studios has added six tenants to its downtown campus.