

Film Happenings

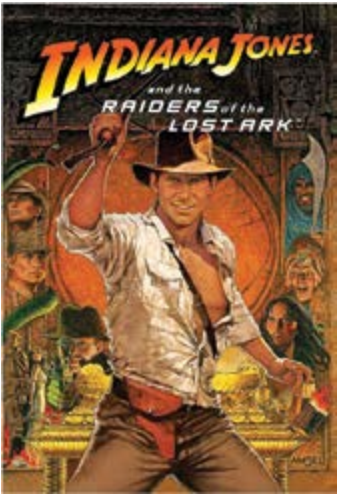
Film Industry Boosted Moab’s Economy after Uranium Biz Went Bust

by Sharon Sullivan

After Moab’s uranium mining industry declined in the 1980s, a group of community leaders got together to discuss ways to boost the local economy. One idea was to revive the region’s film industry that first emerged in 1925, with the making of *The Vanishing American* in Monument Valley.

Moab resident Sherri Griffith, former owner of Sherri Griffith Expeditions, recalled how she and the late Bette Stanton (author of *Where God Put the West: A Moab-Monument Valley Movie History*), plus others, formed an economic development committee to determine how to bring back jobs. The newly formed board of directors settled on three areas of focus: bring back the film industry, promote tourism, and encourage small business development that would support both tourism and the film industry.

Griffith was elected Board of Directors President of Moab Film Promotion in 1986, a position she held for three years. Eventually, the economic development organization, which Griffith continued to serve on for many years, changed its name to Moab Film Commission.



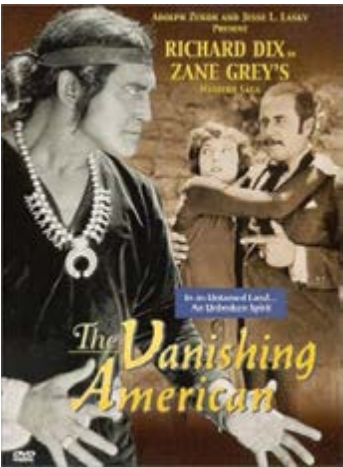
One of the local businesses that sprung up as a result of the newly revived film industry was one founded by Griffith’s brother, Ron Griffith. Griffith Production Services supported the making of commercials, music videos and other small productions.

“He would see what people needed and found people around town who could help and needed jobs – which was the whole idea,” Sherri

Griffith said.

Griffith worked on a few movies, herself – such as *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, starring Harrison Ford and River Phoenix. She recalled an opening scene where Phoenix (who portrayed a young Indiana Jones (Ford) was asked to mount a horse. Phoenix refused, however, upon learning the saddle was made of leather – because he was “vegan.” So, production halted while the crew located a plastic saddle, recalled Griffith.

Another time, at a site inspection, Griffith met a producer who told her he loved her name. A year or so later,



during the making of the film *Nightmare at Noon*, Griffith introduced herself as Sherri Griffith to an actor who replied “no, you’re not Sherri Griffith; Kimberly got the part.” To Griffith’s surprise, the producer had actually used her name for one of his characters.

Griffith’s river rafting company worked on a couple of commercials, and sometimes took actors – like Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis (from the movie *Thelma and Louise*) on river rafting excursions on their days off.

As Grand County continued to focus on long-range economic development, new facilities were constructed such as the Old Spanish Trail Arena which could be used as a “covered set” – a type of facility requested by the producers and directors working in southeast Utah.

In 1988, the Moab Film Commission expanded to include all of San Juan County in its location promotion, eventually changing its name to Moab to Monument Valley Film Commission. The film commission is the longest ongoing film promotion and assistance group on record.



Moab Museum of Film and Western Heritage
Admission is FREE
and open to the public

Located on the grounds of the Red Cliffs Lodge Moab, the Moab Museum of Film and Western Heritage showcases the history of films produced at or near the property, featuring memorabilia, film artifacts and exhibits tied to productions such as *Thelma and Louise*, *Geronimo*, *Rio Grande*, *Warlock* and more. It highlights Moab’s prominence in Western Film history and celebrates the region’s starring role in Hollywood Westerns and adventure films, offering visitors a glimpse into Moab’s cinematic legacy and the iconic red rock scenery that has captivated generations of filmmakers.

Moab Downtown Entertainment Winds up Fall Season in October

Fall is the best time to be outdoors in the desert. Not only are there plenty of natural wonders to see in Moab, there’s also lots of fun entertainment available right downtown. October is one of the most popular months to come to Moab. If you’re looking for something totally different and fun, there’s the Moab Backyard Theater, located right in the heart of downtown. It’s open to all ages and great fun for grown-ups and kids alike. Not only is it a blast, but The Backyard Theater is one of the only open-air entertainment venues in the west, a throwback to the old west days when traveling shows entertained culture-starved pioneers on the dusty streets of the frontier towns. Located just a half-block off Main street in downtown, The Backyard Theater features Magic and Music two nights a week. The stage sits beneath a giant cottonwood tree that is older than the town itself. In its 12th year of operation, the theater has entertained thousands of people from all over the world. They come to see an old-fashioned type of American entertainment that has all but vanished in the rest of the country.



Every Wednesday, traditional bluegrass music returns to the theater. The band Quicksand Soup performs old-time standards and unique originals starting at 7pm. The free show has become a downtown fixture over the last few years and it’s common to see both locals and tourists alike tapping their toes.

Saturdays, the southwest’s only outdoor downtown Magic show returns with the award-winning magic of Rick Boretti. Rick’s hilarious routine changes constantly, but always involves lots of wisecracks and mystifying magic tricks. Folks have been known to return year after year for the show. Kids love

Rick’s magic, but adults are often amazed at how much they love it too. If you haven’t caught a real magic show in a while, then you might have forgotten how fun they can be. Shows start at 7pm. Weather permitting, there will even be a Halloween Magic Show this year!! Music is always free. Magic Prices are 15 dollars for folks over 12 and 8 dollars for kids over 3. 3 and under are free. The theater often features the authentic cooking of El Local Cocina Food Truck, and always allows outside food and drink. It is located just behind Zax at 56 W. 100 South



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