



P R O D U C E R

Ned Dowd

wraps up \$65 million Viking epic for Disney in British Columbia

Ned Dowd, veteran Hollywood producer and director, says Canada is an ideal place in which to make films. "Everything you need is here," he says, "good people, good facilities, good lab support — and tax benefits besides."

Canada Investment News spoke with Dowd in Vancouver last November where he had just completed principal photography on his latest project, *Eaters of the Dead*, a \$65 million adaptation of a Michael Crichton novel for the Walt Disney Company's Touchstone Pictures Division. A Viking epic set in the 8th century, the film is directed by John McTiernan, director of such hits as the three *Die Hards* and *The Hunt for Red October*. *Eaters of the Dead* is the largest picture ever shot in Canada.

"When you decide to shoot outside Hollywood you need to look carefully at all the locally available resources" says Dowd.

"And I mean all. For example: some locations will offer superb studio facilities but are short on experienced people. So if you're not careful, you wind up bringing in your crew from outside the area. That means loading your budget up with additional accommodation and per diem expenses.

"Here in B.C. and also in Ontario where I've worked on many productions, we've been able to find it all — experienced crews, excellent studio facilities and good film labs.

"In fact, Vancouver and Toronto have as much or more to offer in these respects as competing out-of-Hollywood locations in the U.S. such as Chicago, Dallas or New York."

American settings at Canadian prices

For films set in the United States, Canadian locations offer not only generally lower prices but the additional advantage of the North American look. Toronto and Vancouver, for example, offer the skylines, signage, automobile makes and transit hardware typical of the American city scene.

In fact, the first major wave of U.S. film-making arrived in Canada in the early 1980s when producers looking for lower-cost North American urban locations began moving productions from New York City to Toronto.

On Canada's Pacific Coast, Vancouver has exerted a similar pull, becoming a major centre for both theatrical and TV series productions (see page 4). However, it was British Columbia's majestic outdoors rather than its city locations that attracted Dowd for this project. "We were looking for a setting resembling Scandinavian fjords. We found exactly what we needed along the British Columbia coast."

Dowd adds that in Canada both the scenic backdrops and the prices are right. "Costs are generally lower," he says, "the currency exchange rate is very favorable for an American company, and Canadian tax incentives are attractive because you get back a percentage of the money you spend in Canada."

"That was particularly useful for a period movie like *Eaters of the Dead*. For productions of that kind, you have to make rather than rent your props and wardrobes. We did most of that in British Columbia. In fact, of the total \$65 million budget, I estimate we spent \$40 to \$50 million here."

Dowd also credits B.C. and Ontario government film development offices with aggressively and intelligently promoting their provinces as film-making locations. "It helps if you have an active film office that can do the legwork up front, to show you what's available in the area you're considering. I know that I can pick up the phone, call one of these offices and within 24 hours they will have a dozen folders of location pictures on my desk."

While Dowd has produced many films in Ontario, *Eaters of the Dead* is his first in B.C. Summing up his experience he says, "We had many options for locations. Whenever we've chosen Canada we've never been sorry." ♦

Ned Dowd's résumé as a film-maker includes a stellar list of credits on both the production and the directing sides. For five years he was head of production for Disney's Caravan Pictures Division.

