

Lights, camera, action at last

By Murray Williams

Dreamworld, the long-planned, long-delayed Cape Town "Hollywood-style" film studio city, is about to rise from the ground.

Building on the mega-project begins on October 20, and the foundations of the four planned studios are already anchored into the soil of the site at the corner of the N2 and the R310, towards Stellenbosch.

Nico Dekker, the former head and chief executive of Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios, has been appointed chief executive of Cape Town Film Studios - widely regarded as a coup for what will be one of the most significant developments in the Western Cape for years.

"This is one of the greatest challenges of my life," Dekker said at the site on Wednesday.

"It's the first time South Africa and Africa will have Hollywood-style studios.

"South Africa is already a major location destination" - thanks to its abundance of natural beauty and features."

Already, around 30 international feature films and 300 commercials are shot in South Africa every year. But filmmakers have always had to travel elsewhere in the world to find established, state-of-the-art studios.

No longer.

The site measures 200ha, a total 60ha of which will form the first phase.

Behind the development are shareholders Videovision Entertainment, headed by Anant Singh; Sabido Investments/Etv, headed by Marcel Golding; the Rico Trust, the Helderberg African Chamber of Commerce; and Wesgro, the Western Cape's investment and trade promotion agency.

"This is where dreams will come true. People are going to make love and war here, create artificial worlds which will be carried to big screens and households all over the world... on-screen memories which will remain for generations to come," he said.

The project is also likely to serve as a catalyst for a whole new development node in the area. When the project was first mooted the site was isolated on a largely barren part of the Cape Flats, but subsequent development has since sprung up nearby - including De Wijnlanden towards Stellenbosch, and a host of residential areas in the Croydon/Faure area.

"We invite the South African film industry to make this their home, their playground," Dekker said.

To service the film industry's needs, a small army of carpenters, set-builders, seamstresses, printers and others would find new opportunities.

More broadly, Dekker estimates that for every R1 spent on actual production, another R2.50 is spent elsewhere - hotels or the service industry.

When the movie 10 000BC was secretly filmed in Cape Town in 2005, \$50-million was spent on filming alone. In today's terms, just two such productions could inject R2-billion into the Cape Town economy, Dekker calculated.

The first phase of the construction is hoped to be ready by early 2010.

Project managers Target Consultants, who worked on the Cape Town International Convention Centre, are also working on the airport's expansion and the revamp of Cape Town station.

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