

Walla Walla to be featured in prime-time documentary

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Walla Walla: Prepare for another close-up. This time in a short-form documentary narrated by actor Rob Lowe.

Walla Walla County commissioners Monday approved a studio production authorization that sets the stage for filming here and coverage in a three- to five-minute piece for the series known as “On Demand.”

Commission Chairman Jim Johnson said the county will now complete a questionnaire for the production firm. Once returned, a better idea of dates should be forthcoming. The project cycle is 90 to 120 days.

The award-winning program highlights stories and innovative concepts through short-form and long-form presentation. Topics have included integrative medicine, culinary tours, green building solutions, advanced manufacturing technologies and materials, water preservation and more.

The content is created through an intensive shooting schedule and relatively quick turnaround, Johnson said. Ultimately, it’s distributed to public television stations in all 50 states with an estimated reach in a year’s time of 60 million households.

The county has initiated a partnership with the Port of Walla Walla to serve as content experts for the piece, which comes with a production cost of about \$27,000 to be split between the two agencies. The agreement also includes a five- to six-minute corporate profile on the issues and educational message, a one-minute educational commercial segment used for network distribution to be used once prime-time in more than 84 million homes through MSNBC, CNBC, CNN or an equivalent network. That segment will air 400 times in many of the top 100 Direct Marketing Areas during peak and prime time.

Johnson acknowledged this is a different role with the county as the lead agency on what essentially serves as a marketing piece for Walla Walla. But it's one the agency is happy to have as a way to highlight more of the Valley's industrial and farming history in a way that may attract other businesses.

"I think I want to talk about what a well-rounded community this is," Johnson contemplated. "Tourism is a big thing now, and we're a wine destination. That's all great. But we don't want to forget our roots and our past. This is also wheat country.

"We enjoy much better weather on our side of the state. We have four seasons. We have three colleges, farming, tourism, the penitentiary — our economy is well-rounded."

What he hopes viewers will see: a great place to raise families, where you can drive home for lunch or leave work at 5 p.m. and arrive within minutes to watch your child's baseball game.

He said the project was initiated through a call from a staff member for the production.

Communities chosen, he said, are selected from among the top places to live, work and raise a family.

The cost to participate, he said, is about 10 percent of the actual production cost.

Port Commissioner Mike Fredrickson said the investment in that level of coverage could even be less than a more regionally produced video with far less reach.

"It looks like it's really good exposure," Fredrickson said.

To talk about the advances made over the years in Walla Walla County carries loads of possibilities in content: the existing industrial base, wine, farming, the plow-to-plate movement, the river system.

"This could get us in front of site selectors and hopefully leads to something more," Fredrickson said.

In summary: "I think it could end up being really spectacular," he said.