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## County contributes \$250,000 for movie

BY DAVID SINGLETON STAFF WRITER

All right, Mr. Sorvino, we're ready for our close-up.

In an unprecedented move by Lackawanna County government, the commissioners Tuesday agreed to set aside \$250,000 to help finance a feature motion picture that will be directed by actor Paul Sorvino and filmed in the Scranton area. The money will come from the county's cultural and education fee, which majority Commissioners A.J. Munchak and Robert C. Cordaro enacted a year ago to promote the arts and culture. The fee is expected to generate more than \$1.2 million next year.

"We look at this as a tremendous economic opportunity for Lackawanna County, a very important effort to showcase our people, our places and all we have to offer to the rest of the world," Mr. Cordaro said.

Mr. Sorvino, a longtime friend of the late Scranton actor and playwright Jason Miller, said casting will get under way within the next two weeks and principal photography on "The Trouble with Cali" could start as early as April.

He did not say what the project's budget will be, calling it only "a small film."

It will be very much a Sorvino family project. In addition to directing and acting in the picture, Mr. Sorvino will be one of the producers, along with his son, Michael. The screenplay was written by his daughter, Amanda. Daughter Mira, who is an accomplished actress in her own right, may have a cameo role, he said.

At Tuesday's commissioners meeting, Mr. Sorvino, 66, said he views the county's commitment as an investment, not a grant. The way the package will be structured, he said, the county "actually stands to make a profit."

"The fact that I'm in it sort of guarantees at least a TV sale, so there is very little risk here," he told the commissioners. "This is actually an investment I'm sure will come back."

In addition, there will be a direct economic benefit to the area as cast and crew utilize hotels, restaurants and other local businesses, Mr. Sorvino said.

More important, he said, it could help Scranton and Lackawanna County lure other motion picture projects "when it gets around that this is a film-friendly town." Because of its proximity to New York, it might be an ideal area to take old, unused factories and convert them into sound stages, he said.

"This is really a kind of pilot program," he said.

Minority Commissioner Michael J. Washo suggested that if the county were to see a return on its \$250,000 investment, the proceeds could be put into a revolving fund to serve as a catalyst for other film projects.

Mr. Cordaro initially said the city had also agreed to commit \$250,000 to the film — a statement both he and Mayor Chris Doherty later said was incorrect.

Mr. Doherty, who said he discussed the project with Mr. Cordaro, called it a "progressive idea" but said the city is not in the position to put up money. If the city can help in other ways, he said, it will.

"I don't see it as the role of city government to be investing in movies, especially a city government that has to borrow money to meet its obligations," Mr. Doherty said.

Mr. Cordaro said he would still like to discuss the project with the Scranton Redevelopment Authority or other economic development agencies to see if there are ways they can participate.

Mr. Sorvino described "The Trouble with Cali" as a "serio-comic" tale about a young girl from a dysfunctional family who has stars in her eyes and is romanced by a talent scout.

Mr. Sorvino's relationship with Mr. Miller began 33 years ago, when he acted in the Scranton native's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "That Championship Season." He also appeared in the movie version of "That Championship Season" that Mr. Miller filmed in Scranton in the early 1980s.

The 1-mill cultural and education fee, like the county's real estate tax, is based on assessed property valuation. With a mill equal to \$1 in tax for each \$1,000 in assessed value, the fee will cost the average county property owner just over \$13 next year.

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