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UPFRONT

Film Off On Texico, But Not the State

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TEXICO — Kevin Costner is the lead actor in the new movie “Swing Vote,” but the New Mexico town of Texico is the real star.

As in, “Where the hell is Texico, New Mexico?”

And, “Is that a place?”

Those are laugh-getting lines in “Swing Vote,” a Disney look at American politics in which the plot turns on a presidential election that literally comes down to one man’s vote.

That one man is Bud, a beer-swilling dumb-ass who was born and raised in Texico, the small town where the movie takes place.

The film was actually shot in Belen, Albuquerque and Santa Fe, which is obvious if you’ve ever been to Texico.

Because Texico, The Movie has a 12-lane bowling alley, mountains, a “bingo hall and dancing palace,” a big eggpacking plant, a river, a TV station and an airport big enough to land Air Force One. The real Texico doesn’t. What the real Texico has is 1,065 people, four churches, two restaurants, a truck stop and a bank. The movie hasn’t gotten much buzz in the real Texico, which sits within spittin’ distance of Texas on the far eastern side of the state.

Only one person I talked to there had seen it.

“Texico actually doesn’t have a movie theater,” Rhonda Hill at the First Baptist Church of Texico explains.

Maybe it’s a good thing for their self-esteem that not many of the good people in the real Texico are flocking to Clovis to watch the movie version of Texico.

When the media horde descends on the fictional Texico, those big-city reporters find the usual small-town dopes out of central casting to interview.

And the top-dog at the local Texico TV station, thinking this story might launch him into the big leagues, exclaims, “I thought I was going to die in this (dirty word that no one wants their town called)!”

Hill, who saw the movie with her husband in Roswell, wasn’t too taken with the big screen version of her town.

“I think they wanted to portray a kind of hick town,” she said.

The movie version of Texico doesn't mention that the town is the proud home of champion bull rider L.J. Jenkins or that case full of championship trophies in just about every sport for the killer Wolverines of Texico High.

But the movie has all sorts of great New Mexico touches, like ancient poll workers, little kids taking the keys and driving their drunken parents home, a dude with a deliciously curly mullet, embarrassingly delayed vote counts and voter fraud.

The plot hinges on a civic-minded girl who sneaks in and tries to cast her deadbeat dad's vote in the presidential election while he's passed out drunk. True to real life, all of the other states have their votes counted on election night, but New Mexico remains a question mark.

Why?

Because a poll worker accidentally knocks the plug to the electronic voting machine out of the wall, cutting the power and interrupting what would be the tie vote in the presidential election.

All eyes are on little Texico and New Mexico as it takes registered New Mexico voter Bud a good two weeks to make up his mind.

Moviegoers in other states might toss that off as a hard-to-believe Hollywood plot device.

In New Mexico, it makes the movie seem like a documentary.

Remember earlier this year when Democrats voting in the presidential caucus scratched their choices on scraps of paper when polling places ran out of ballots?

And remember how those votes weren't tallied until nine days after the election?

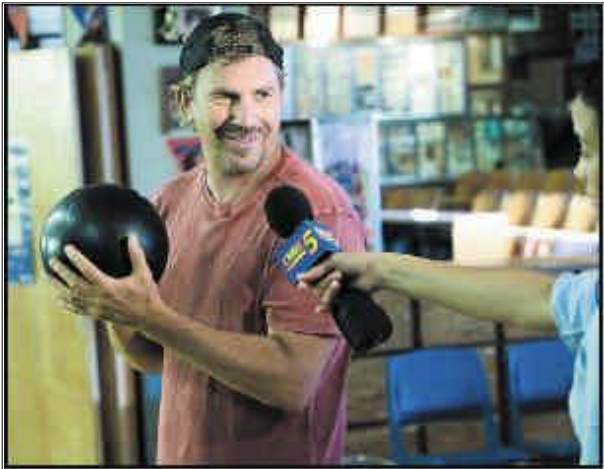
How about 2004 when it took three weeks to determine George Bush beat John Kerry here?

Or 2000 when the nation waited a full month to fill in New Mexico (blue for Al Gore, as it turned out) on all those electoral maps.

The movie makers were way off on one thing, though. The New Mexico secretary of state is an old white guy wearing a bolo tie.

Everyone knows state statute requires that position be filled by a Hispanic woman with great hair.

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BEN GLASS/DISNEY Kevin Costner is Bud, a voter in Texico, New Mexico, whose miscast vote holds up

a presidential election in "Swing Vote."



BEN GLASS/DISNEY A media throng descends on Texico in "Swing Vote," something that has never occurred in the history of the real town.