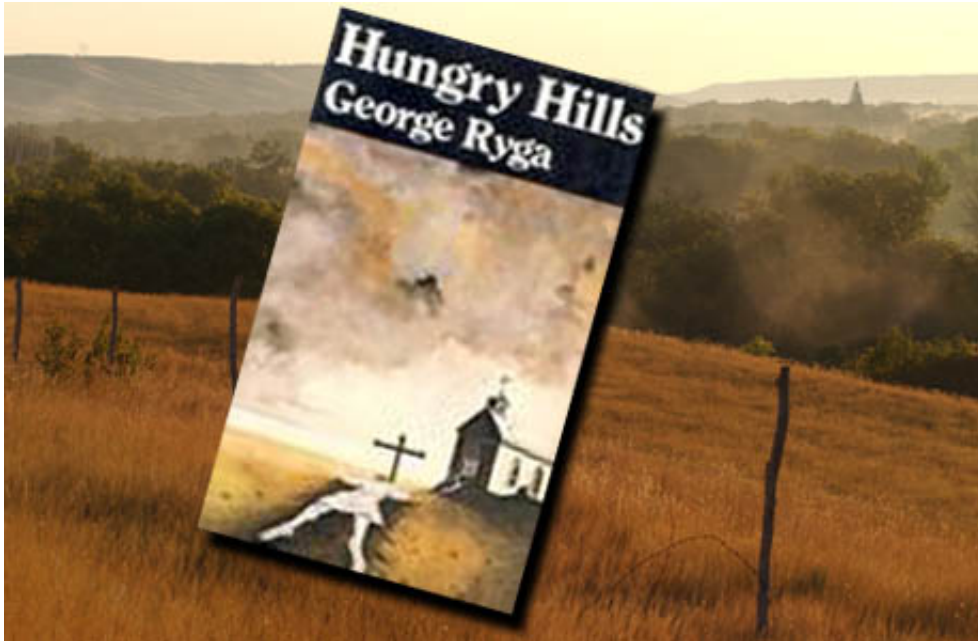


# Saskatchewan film 'Hungry Hills' to premiere at Toronto International Film Festival

BY HEATHER POLISCHUK, LEADER-POST AUGUST 12, 2009



Hungry Hills, shot mainly in the Qu'Appelle Valley in May, is one of six films selected for the Toronto International Film Festival's Canada First!, showcasing Canadians presenting a film at the festival for the first time.

**Photograph by:** leaderpost.com, photo illustration

REGINA — Those involved in the Saskatchewan-made Hungry Hills aren't starving for accolades as their film prepares to premiere at the world-renowned Toronto International Film Festival next month.

The film, shot mainly in the Qu'Appelle Valley in May, is one of six films selected for TIFF's Canada First!, showcasing Canadians presenting a film at the festival for the first time.

Producer Rhonda Baker said after five years working on the film, she's thrilled, although she "always thought it would get there."

"I think we actually believed that it had such a good script and I think we believed that the quality was going to be there . . .," said Baker. "I think we felt that we had the skills to get it there once we finally got it financed."

The budget for the film — based on George Ryga's novel — was low at \$1.2 million, meaning cast and crew worked simply for the love of the project, director Rob King said.

He said TIFF must have noticed something, since the selection committee chose it without even seeing the completed film, which finished shooting just days before TIFF's deadline.

"We decided on a wing and a prayer to see if we could enter in sort of a rough edit and the festival gave us a little bit of an extension," he said.

King later received a call telling him the film was in, "which I think is maybe a first for a feature film made by Saskatchewan people and a Saskatchewan director in that festival."

That's good news to Susanne Bell, CEO and film commissioner for SaskFilm. She noted that while Corner Gas — which both King and Baker worked on — opened doors for Saskatchewan television-wise, similar success in the film industry has not come easy.

"We've co-produced and co-ventured with American production companies and European production companies and have seen success with that," she said. "The difference with this is it's a feature film that's our very own that's premiering at one of the most prestigious film festivals in the world."

The possibility of awards doesn't matter to King, who's just happy to see his film at the festival.

"It sounds like a cliché but I'm honoured that we're in there and I hope it does well . . . that it will at least get good reviews and a good turnout at the screenings," he said. "From there, everything is just gravy."

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