Group aims to have ads shooting here

By STAN BULLARD

If the recent Progressive Corp. television commercial with platoons of sport utility vehicles rolling across a bridge and through a downtown looks familiar, it should.

The nationally broadcast spot was shot largely in downtown Cleveland and at the auto insurer’s Mayfield Village headquarters. It’s one of the first fruits of a new “Shoot North Coast” campaign to try to convince local companies to shoot their TV commercials here.

The campaign was launched formally Sept. 1 by the Greater Cleveland Media Development Corp. of Cleveland after a year of behind-the-scenes efforts. The nonprofit development corporation was formed in 1998 to promote increased production of film, television and other forms of mass media here, according to its president, Chris Carmody.

While much attention has been focused on the commission’s successes in snaring shoots for motion pictures, it’s now settling into the grittier task of doing the same for commercials.

The commission has decided to take a personal approach that involves board members contacting executives at local companies to ask them to shoot commercials here, said Jim Bennett, Greater Cleveland Media Development chairman and senior executive vice president at KeyCorp.

“When we make contact at the senior level of management, the chief executive officer or a member of the management committee, we will make the point that it’s important to the region,” Mr. Bennett said. “People say, ‘Let me encourage our marketing people in that direction.’ It’s not arm-twisting, but it’s better done peer to peer.”

The media commission took this tack after interviewing local agencies and finding they’re often not the agencies of record for big advertisers, Mr. Bennett said. Those out-of-town agencies typically use out-of-town production companies and locales with which they’re familiar.

To build its case for bringing commercials home, Mr. Bennett approached Progressive CEO Peter Lewis about shooting its TV spot here. The media commission’s contact led Progressive to shoot two-thirds of the spot here rather than one-quarter, as originally planned, said David Pratt, Progressive marketing director.

Originally, all the truck scenes were to have been shot in California, home base of the commercial’s production company, Omaha Pictures Inc. of Hollywood. Omaha was skeptical but open-minded, and it wound up liking the Cleveland locations, Mr. Pratt said.

Mr. Bennett’s company, KeyCorp, shot two of its “Where will you be in 2020?” retirement planning campaign commercials in Cleveland. One included a scene from outside Cleveland Public Library, and another was at Tower City Center.

Mr. Carmody said the media commission’s research shows the potential gains for the area are tremendous. Greater Cleveland is the home to the third-largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies in the nation, and the commission calculates that area’s top 20 advertisers have ad budgets that total more than $250 million annually.

“We haven’t been able to determine how many commercials are shot here, but it’s a very small percentage,” Mr. Carmody said.