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On location

Michigan Film Office brings talent, money to state

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Lansing -Two employees in a tiny Michigan government office work each day to bring millions of film-industry dollars to cities and towns across the state.

Director Janet Lockwood and her student assistant, MSU film studies senior Mike Forest, have spent time working with cast and crew from blockbuster movies such as "8 Mile," "Road to Perdition" and other independent projects. The current project, "The Retreat," will be released in the fall and features a cast largely from Michigan.

The Michigan Film Office, 702 W. Kalamazoo St. in Lansing, was formed in 1979 as a part of the state's Department of History, Arts and Libraries. The office markets Michigan as a location for movies, television shows, commercials and other film industry-related projects, as a way to bring extra cash into the state.

The office is responsible for helping the crews with locations, permits, security and everything else from portable toilets to pigeons, she said.

"We're a gopher for the industry," Lockwood said.

Michigan makes about \$1 billion to \$3 billion a year from TV commercial revenues, and often is among the top five



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Janet Lockwood, the director for the Michigan Film Office and a Lansing resident, sits in her cluttered office, surrounded by posters of films shot completely, or in part, in Michigan. Lockwood is instrumental in bringing the film productions to Michigan. Her department is state run, consisting of herself and an assistant, and is devoted to bringing filmmakers to Michigan.



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Future Media Corp. President Bob Bishop, left, and employee Ryan Tarrant, right, work on a promo shoot of United Kennel Club President Wayne Cavanaugh,

states in the country for commercial shoots, Lockwood said.

In the 1930s, Michigan produced more feet in film than the rest of the world combined, Lockwood said. The state originally developed a large infrastructure for filming commercials because of the auto industry.

"We were the biggest long ago, and they just stuck around," she said. "It's just one of those lucky things."

Bob Bishop owns and runs Future Media Corp., an Okemos-based production company that works with major television networks and international businesses, such as NBC and the British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC.

"We can be much more efficient, and the work here is good, too," Bishop said of filming in Michigan. "We're not taking sloppy seconds. We're just as likely to work for the BBC here as we would in New York City."

There is more competition for projects in the big cities, he said.

Michigan brought in about \$10 million in 2004 from movies filmed in the state, Lockwood said. Michigan is about 20th in the country for movie filming, she said.

"Movies - we're middle of the pack," she said. "We have good years, we have bad years. This past year, 2004, was a pretty good year."

Lockwood said she recently had to find trained pigeons for the movie "The Island," starring Ewan McGregor and Scarlett Johansson.

The movie, which is set in Los Angeles, was filmed partly in Detroit and will be out in theaters in July.

"The people from DreamWorks really enjoyed the support they got from city," said Brad Van Dommelen, senior vice president of the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau.

center, on Thursday in Kalamazoo.

The promotional video will be used for the Westminster Dog Show.

Movies filmed in Michigan

- 1980 "Somewhere in Time" in Mackinac Island
- 1981, 1987 "The Evil Dead" (I and II) in Detroit and Marshall
- 1984, 1994 "Beverly Hills Cop" (I and III) in Detroit
- 1990 "Die Hard 2" in Alpena, Kincheloe and Sault Ste. Marie
- 1993 "True Romance" in Detroit
- 1994 "Renaissance Man" in Detroit and Port Huron
- 1997 "Grosse Pointe Blank" in Grosse Pointe and Detroit
- 1997 "Vegas Vacation" in Ypsilanti
- 1998 "Out of Sight" in Bloomfield Hills and Detroit
- 2001 "Hard Ball" in Detroit
- 2001 "Escanaba in da Moonlight" in Escanaba
- 2001 "Driven" in Detroit
- 2001 "61*" in Detroit
- 2001 "American Pie 2" in Grand Haven

"They really had a good experience, and I'm hoping maybe that will translate into some other opportunities down the road for us."

Filmmaker Bob Brown of Purple Rose Films said the Michigan Film Office is the central clearinghouse for anyone in the industry.

Brown co-founded Purple Rose Films with actor Jeff Daniels in 1998 and has shot films, such as "Escanaba in da Moonlight," in Michigan.

Brown and Daniels make it their goal to film in Michigan and use in-state talent.

Brown is working on "The Retreat" in Harbor Springs. About 90 percent of the cast and crew are from Michigan, and Brown said he likes working with Michigianians.

Kathy Lott, director of the Harbor Springs Chamber of Commerce, said she is looking forward to the boost in the city's economy as a result of the movie, which is projected to bring in about \$250,000.

Michigan is nice to work in because the residents don't have preconceived notions about what the experience is about, and they usually embrace the project, Brown said.

But some states offer more incentives, such as tax breaks, so a movie might cost more to film in Michigan, Brown said, adding that it is still affordable to work in Michigan.

Currently, filmmakers are exempt from paying taxes on Michigan hotels if they stay for more than 30 days, and Lockwood said they are introducing an incentive package that would eliminate the 6 percent sales tax for filmmakers.

Marta Tomkiw, location manager, scout and filmmaker, has worked all over the world on projects such as "8 Mile," "61*" and "S.W.A.T." She said Michigan is competitive with cities such as Los Angeles and New York for its appeal to filmmakers.

"I love working in Michigan," Tomkiw said. "Their work is just as good as in other cities. It's right at same level."

- 2002 "Road to Perdition" in Grand Rapids, Saugatuck, West Olive and Zeeland
- 2002 "8 Mile" in Metro Detroit
- 2004 "Against the Ropes" in Detroit
- 2005 "The Island" in Detroit

Source: Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries, Internet Movie Database

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