

Lights. Camera. Action!

Dayton opens its doors the film industry

Location! Location! Location!

FilmDayton provides an easy access, one-stop-shop for filmmakers

“It’s about creating an industry and a sustainable, long term industry,” Schwarz said. “Have just movies with no infrastructure is cool but it’s not an industry. We’re thinking about tomorrow, not just today.”

Recently, there’s been a big boom in the Ohio film community. In the past few years an incredible number of films began filming throughout Ohio, both in urban and rural areas. From big budget films like “Carol,” filmed in Cincinnati, or “Captain America,” filmed in Cleveland, to lesser known low-budget films and television shows.

With all of the buzz surrounding film in Ohio, why shouldn’t Dayton get in on the action? That’s exactly what the Dayton film community thought, and they decided to do something about it.

FilmDayton, a non-profit organization and the Dayton Film Commission, which grew under the FilmDayton umbrella, are working towards growth and longevity in the film community, and are dedicated to building that community in Dayton.

“What we ultimately want to see happen is to create spanned industry from this area going out to the wider world,” Shaunn Baker, owner of the World Stage Media production company and supporter of FilmDayton, said. “We want to create sustainable jobs in the community and create a bigger boom to the local economy.”

FilmDayton began in 2007 out of DaytonCREATE, a community organization aimed at connecting the people and ideas of Greater Dayton and empowering the creative community. Under the guidance of DaytonCREATE the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE) put together a Creative Class team which brought Dr. Richard Florida, an American urban theorist, and the Creative Class Group’s “Creative Communities Leadership Project” to the Dayton area.

It’s no wonder why Dayton wants a piece of the film industry pie. Entertainment, and more specifically film and television, is one of the few American exports that makes money. In 2013, the film industry alone posted \$31 billion dollars in revenues, an increase from 2012, and a number that is only expected to grow in years to come.

“[The film industry] is an export that makes money,” Baker said. “And there is no reason we can’t be part of that conversation.”

One way in which FilmDayton is hoping to attract potential filmmakers is with their website, complete with crew and locations databases. On the website producers, location scouts and a host of others involved in the filmmaking process, can access all of the information they need in one spot.

“The database project is part of a larger effort we have going. We’re trying to make it easier to come here,” Baker said. “A consideration is ease. Do we have a location for their need and is it easy to shoot in this area? We want to make it easy to shoot.”

This effort to make things simpler and easier on potential “clients” is something that resonates with the film industry beyond Dayton.

“Being user friendly, and being able to easily get permits,” Antonia Ellis, currently the supervising producer of “Royal Pains” for the USA network, said when discussing what might draw a production to a certain area. “As well, how easily you can lock down support from local police, security, hotels, cast and crew are all very important.”

On the FilmDayton webpage the commission provides information on and links to the location database, which comes with descriptions and pictures of all that Greater Dayton has to offer. Filmmakers can peruse through the photos of landmarks in Dayton, Downtown, as well as suburban and rural areas of Dayton.

“We have remarkably good locations,” Baker said. “Contemporary urban environment, and really good rural environments. We have rivers and hills - a good selection of locations that are really photogenic.”

Local photographer, Bill Franz, has also taken an interest in FilmDayton and their online database. Franz hopes to attract a crowd who’s looking for something they can’t find anywhere else - especially Cincinnati.

“I looked [at first] for things that are present here but not in Cincinnati,” Franz said. “That way a film crew headquartered in Greater Cincinnati might be lured North for a few days of shooting, or we might even attract someone to be headquartered in Dayton.”

Franz says eventually the database will have all types of possible settings for movies but they are focusing on this aspect now. Including places such as, Sunwatch, a historically accurate 700-year-old pre-Indian village and the Michoacana Mexican Market.

The close proximity to a larger Ohio city, Cincinnati, could be considered a hinderance to Dayton’s film goals. However, some in Dayton, and beyond, don’t see it as such.

“I don’t think being close to Cincinnati hurts Dayton at all,” Ellis said. “I think it’s probably a benefit. I don’t think it’s similar to Cincinnati and there’s an airport that’s huge and that’s a big deal.”

As well, Cincinnati and Dayton aren’t competing for the same projects, necessarily, according to Shaunn Baker.

“Cincinnati has a tendency to play for older New York City in films and we’re not going to compete with that,” Baker said. “But we have a more contemporary urban environment here and we’re a remarkably easy community to shoot in.”

Beyond the big cities, Ohio, and Greater Dayton, offers areas that are incredibly similar to those in Upstate New York, and with the friendly communities and ease of shooting, provides a nice alternative to shooting in places like New York state.

“In the surrounding areas the topography is very similar between Ohio and New York,” Ellis said. “And many of the cities in Ohio could double for a lot of cities.”

Not only is the topography of Ohio, as well as the non-cumbersome nature of the business side of things, a draw for filmmakers, but it is the Ohio Motion Picture Tax Incentive that served as the catalyst for Ohio’s movie boom.

“First of all, if there was no film incentive, not one movie that has been filmed in the last four years would’ve been filmed here,” Ivan Schwarz, the President of the Greater Cleveland Film Commission, said. “It helped us get in the game.”

Schwarz, a transplant from California who first noticed Cleveland while scouting for the HBO series, “Band of Brothers,” wrote the film incentive and was instrumental in getting it passed, and then doubled a few years ago.

According to the Ohio Film Office, as well as the Ohio Government webpage, the incentive “known as the Ohio Motion Picture Tax Credit, is a refundable, non-transferable tax credit of 25-35-percent off the amount of a production company’s qualifying expenditures that are incurred in producing a film or other media entertainment project in Ohio.”

Basically meaning a filmmaker or production company receives at least a 25-percent refund on all in-state spending, when they choose to film in Ohio, and have applied for the credit. These

expenditures include production equipment, cast and crew wages, accommodations, editing, makeup, location fees, and many more aspects of filmmaking.

“Filmmakers don’t just get the refund,” Schwarz said. “Once they get approved, the state of Ohio agrees that if you spend one-million dollars in Ohio, we will give you 250,000 dollars. So what the filmmaker does is take that amount to a bank or a lender, in Ohio, borrow the money and use it. So if I’m trying to raise one-million for a movie, all I really need to raise is 750,000 dollars to close that gap.”

In order to be eligible for the the tax credit, productions are required to spend at least 300,000 dollars in the state of Ohio, but the credit is not just available for feature-length films. It is also open to documentaries, web sites, music videos, commercials, sound recordings, videogames, television, and any format of digital media.

In the US today more and more states are passing these motion picture tax credits to entice productions to film in their state and create a sustainable economy. Because of the ever increasing number of “tax-credit-states” it can be hard to remain a competitive and viable option. “We’re as good as any other state. The incentive structure is really good and customer service is great,” Schwarz said. “But at a cap of 20 million dollars per year, we’re limited. I’d like to raise the cap. We need to build on that.”

It isn’t just the big-budget films, like “Ides of March” or well-known indie films like “Kings of Summer” that Ohio film commissions want, but it is the low-budget films and steady flow of productions that really drive the Ohio film industry.

“It’s about creating an industry and a sustainable, long term industry,” Schwarz said. “Have just movies with no infrastructure is cool but it’s not an industry. We’re thinking about tomorrow, not just today.”

The goal of most in the Ohio film industry is to create jobs and foster economic development in the state, using a medium that grosses a great deal of revenue in the US. A way to ensure the creation of an full-fledged, working industry is focusing on workforce development. By providing individuals with the tools, terms and culture of the film industry, these Ohio film offices make it possible for these people and their communities to excel in their work and thrive in this industry. It also makes it much more enticing for filmmakers. If a production company can hire excellent, local talent, it makes choosing the location easier and more affordable.

“People need to get trained, so the day they get on the set they already know the culture and the language, so they can keep their jobs,” Schwarz said. “You have to have the infrastructure and people need to start looking at this as an economic driver, besides how exciting it is - which is great - but it’s way more interesting how many people are being employed and what vendors they’re using.”

Schwarz mentioned that is difficult to rally people, especially for long-term commitment, because the end result is a movie on a screen, and sometimes that doesn’t even happen. But as long as the film offices and people of Ohio do their job and money is spent in Ohio, it’s not on them if the filmmakers didn’t make a good movie.

“A lot of movies get made that we never see, and I don’t care about that,” Schwarz said. “It’s great publicity and whatnot but at the end of the day, when they leave, my interest is that they spend as much money as possible and hire as many people as possible. It’s up to them to make a good movie. At the end of the day it’s business - we think of it as art, but it’s finance.”

Antonia Ellis has a personal connection, as well as professional, to the state of Ohio. She is originally from Youngstown, Ohio and attended college at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. In

2008 she spoke in front of the Ohio House of Representatives in Columbus, in favor of the Ohio Motion Picture Tax Incentive, as a way to boost the Ohio economy.

“The economy and market was going down and it was a great way to infuse the economy ... and why not,” Ellis said. “There’s great, talented people [in Ohio], and so many manufacturing jobs went away, and so there was a slew of people that could be trained.”

Because those interested will receive this workforce training, something many film offices provide including Dayton, prior experience is not a requirement.

“You can have no prior experience. I’m looking for passion and a willingness to learn,” Schwarz said. “You should love it and have a fire in your belly to do it for the right reasons.”

Not only does Dayton provide the no-experience-necessary training, but it is also home to one of the top film schools in the country, Wright State University. Because of the film school, Dayton has a distinct advantage in providing the community with experienced, up-and-coming, eager, young, “wannabe” film industry workers.

“It’s a spectacular program,” Baker, a Wright State alum, said. “and to work on a low budget project with tons and tons of experienced people makes Dayton a remarkable attractive place to film.”

By providing the film community with the film school students and graduates, it helps create and solidify the Dayton film industry, and in turn entices these students to take root in Dayton post-graduation.

“There’s a diaspora of film students of LA, Chicago, Louisiana, Atlanta,” Baker said. “But the cost of living is better here, for many, family is here, and we’re trying to give people opportunities to film here. To stay here and be involved in our work.”

With these lofty goals in mind, the responsibility to create the industry falls not only on those interested in the film industry, but on the Greater Dayton community as well.

“They have as much right as anybody to be filming ... but it is *really* the community that has to make the decision if it wants to participate in this industry,” Schwarz said. “You can’t dabble in it and that’s difficult because it’s hard to touch and feel, it’s not tangible. Movies come and go.”

The FilmDayton office is located at 22 East Fifth Street, Dayton, OH 45402. You can also learn more about the Dayton film community and commission by calling (937) 554-0031 or visiting the FilmDayton website: <http://filmdayton.com/>. To learn more about the Ohio Motion Picture Tax incentive please contact the Ohio Film Office at (614) 644-5156 or visit the website: <http://development.ohio.gov/FilmOffice/default.htm>.