



Lights, camera, Hudson Valley!

Region builds stellar reputation as a top site for location shooting, production facilities, utilizing local talent

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From location houses like Douglas House in Rockland County to the highly anticipated \$100 million sound stages at Lionsgate Studios coming to Yonkers, it's possible to make an entire Hollywood blockbuster without ever leaving the Hudson Valley these days.

Not only are more film and TV productions, such as HBO's "The White House Plumbers," "The Blacklist" from Netflix, and Paramount Pictures' "A Quiet Place" heading to the area to shoot scenes, but production studios are also popping up around the region.

With everything from basic sound editing to full-fledged green screens, these production facilities can now match the best Hollywood has to offer.

"There are very few (facilities) in the Northeast," said Robert Halmi, president and CEO of Great Point Capital and founder of the Hallmark Channel. Halmi's Great Point Capitol is one of the partners behind the new Lionsgate soundstages, due to open in October.

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1. Douglas House in Rockland County offers a variety of spaces for film and TV shoots. PROVIDED BY DOUGLAS HOUSE

2. Evan Collier, left, founder and president of ARCH Production and Design Inc. in Blauvelt, stands with partner Brent Van Dyke. PETER CARR/THE JOURNAL NEWS

3. MTV Fandom Awards, an annual pop culture awards show, films at Douglas House in 2017. PROVIDED BY DOUGLAS HOUSE

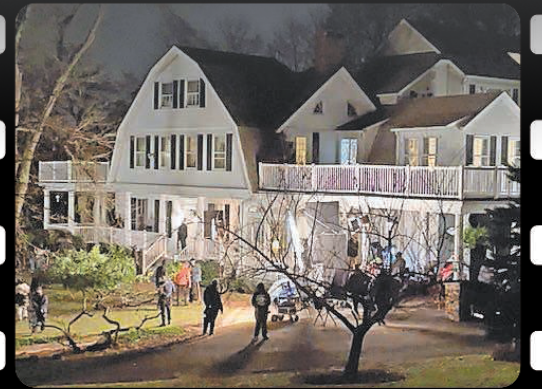
4. A railroad bridge over the Wallkill River in New Paltz is a memorable location from the hit movie "A Quiet Place." PROVIDED BY KATY SILBERGER/COURTESY RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY

5. Actor James Norton and directors Robert Pulcini and Shari Springer Berman work in the Hudson Valley on a scene from "Things Heard & Seen." PROVIDED BY ANNA KOORIS/NETFLIX

6. Production work at Douglas House in Blauvelt. PROVIDED BY DOUGLAS HOUSE

ILLUSTRATION BY JOSHUA ULRICH/USA TODAY NETWORK; AND GETTY IMAGES

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Hudson Valley

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Lionsgate, a film production and distribution studio, is known for films such as “La La Land,” “Knives Out,” “The Hunger Games” franchise and “The Twilight Saga” films.

“There’s great locations, an abundance of looks and it’s a place where people want to be,” Halmi said of the Hudson Valley. “Why not shoot in a beautiful location with great food and great actors who don’t want to leave home.”

Since 2017, 18 qualified production facilities, or QPFs, have opened within the Mid Hudson region, according to Kristin Devoe, director of communications, upstate, for Empire State Development. This includes Upriver Studios in Saugerties, which opened in 2020, and the expansion of Newburgh’s Umbra Stages in 2021.

Anthony’s Pier 9 is part of that expansion. The popular catering hall and wedding venue in New Windsor was recently sold with plans to turn the space into a facility for filming, editing and office space.

Currently, according to Devoe, there are 30 QPFs in the Mid Hudson Region.

“There has been marked growth in the global production industry, particularly with the rise of streaming services,” said Devoe, “At the same time, there has been a growth in New York state’s share of the global market. New York state is (number two) in the nation in production jobs, wages and number of productions.”

“It’s a pretty unusual time in film history and part of it is the growth of streamers and the battle for content,” said Halmi, who produced the film “The Mauritanian.”

“The total amount of money spent on film and television production has grown more than anything else and that’s driven by the success of Netflix and the world streaming market.”

So why are so many productions and studios coming to the Hudson Valley?

Three key reasons are the New York State Film Production Incentive Program, homegrown talent, and the available space and scenery.

In the money

The New York State Film Productive Incentive Program offers a unique tax credit.

It allows eligible production companies to receive a full refund credit of 25% of their qualified production costs, as well as post-production costs within New York state.

Laurent Rejto, director of the Hudson Valley Film Commission, said the tax credit focuses on a film’s “blue collar” and “below the line costs” rather than footing the bill for big-time actors. So, rather than paying a well-known actor’s salary, the money goes to the behind the scenes staff working on the film.

Even during the pandemic, when shooting was shut down for several months in 2020, Devoe said more than 18 productions applied for the tax credit program, anticipating “more than 290 days of filming in the Hudson Valley. These productions anticipated hiring over 44,500 people and spending over \$850 million across New York state.”

Meanwhile, in 2019, over 40 productions applied for the program, spending over \$1 billion across the state.

Not only does the tax incentive help bring film and production studios to the Hudson Valley, it’s helping them stay here.

“That tax credit is literally a lifeline to the people in the region,” said Tony Glazer, managing partner and producer at Umbra of Newburgh.

Umbra is a soundstage facility that offers four acoustical stages, including one drive-on stage. They also have production offices, dressing rooms, cafeteria space and more.

In recent months, Darren Aronofsky’s new film “The Whale,” starring Brendan Fraser, and “Stranger Things” actress Sadie Sink filmed within Umbra’s 18,000-square-foot drive-on soundstage. The stages are currently being used for filming “The White House Plumbers,” starring Woody Harrelson and Justin Theroux, while a yet-to-be announced Hallmark movie will be filmed there this summer.

Umbra is expanding, too.

“We are in the process of retrofitting two spaces in New Windsor, which are subject to some zoning changes. We’re excited but cautiously optimistic,” Glazer said. “We’re expanding because we’re all booked. We’re effectively booked at the three stages we have in Newburgh through the whole year.”

According to Glazer, Umbra Stages have been so popular that they were forced to turn away projects last year.

“We hated doing it,” Glazer said. “The region has become a real magnet for productions.”

Homegrown talent

While the state’s unique tax credit



Lionsgate will open a film production studio in Yonkers in October.

TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS



A film crew from HBO transformed a portion of Poughkeepsie to film scenes for “I Know This Much Is True” in September 2019.

PATRICK OEHLER/POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL



A film crew on Main Street in Poughkeepsie films scenes for the HBO show, “I Know This Much Is True,” on Aug. 28, 2019.

PATRICK OEHLER/POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL



Stella Artois films a commercial at Douglas House in Rockland County in 2019.

PROVIDED BY DOUGLAS HOUSE

helps to attract the film industry, the wealth of talent — from set designers and artists, to actors and directors who live within the Hudson Valley — is another incentive.

Husband-and-wife team Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini chose to film their new movie “Things Heard & Seen” entirely in the Hudson Valley for that very reason: Not only do they live locally, so did most of the cast and crew, including star Amanda Seyfried.

“A lot of people in the movie live here — Amanda, Karen (Allen), Michael (O’Keefe) — so there was a feeling of people living there, not just coming there and working,” Pulcini said of the benefits of producing the film locally.

“I think the Hudson Valley has a lot of talent generally for theater and art production,” said Evan Collier, founder and president of ARCH Production and Design Inc., located in Blauvelt.

ARCH is a production and design studio that designs facades, spaces and sets for restaurants, hospitality spaces, hotels, stores and theater, film or television. One of ARCH’s latest projects was part of late rapper DMX’s memorial.

“In Beacon, Newburgh and Cold Spring there are a lot of artists; Nyack has a lot of musicians and artists,” Collier added.

Artists, musicians and other theatrical talents are often hired by film production companies for a variety of tasks, including acting, set design and more.

What also makes the Hudson Valley attractive is its inclusion in industry “film zones.”

These zones are a 25-mile radius of a specific location. As long as the production crew can stay within this area, it won’t have to be paid for travel time, overnight stays at local hotels and other fees. Once a production moves beyond that 25-mile radius, it has to spend more money and time housing crew members, supplying transportation and more. There are currently two zones in relation to the Hudson Valley, according to Rejto: the Columbus Circle film zone in New York City and the IBM zone in Poughkeepsie.

“That gave producers a huge advantage and they could hire people within 25 miles of the IBM Zone because local hires make it easier,” Rejto said. “They realized (the Hudson Valley) is not just some place; people in the industry noticed this was for real.”

Not only that, but productions are using local vendors for things like artistic design, food, and other production needs.

“When productions come into town they’re hiring all sorts of local vendors,” Glazer said. “There’s a lot of crew that already live in the Hudson Valley who would normally commute to New York City, so we already have a strong crew base.”

Helping surrounding communities

When a film or television production

comes to an area, or a production facility opens, it doesn’t just help the film industry, it also has an economic impact on the community.

“An average budget for a streaming show is \$100 million,” Halmi said. “The crew is not just staying in the studio; they’re spending money on food, transportation, car rentals, housing and other local businesses and it’s a real boost for the community.”

Production studios, such as Umbra Stages, also offer community programs such as Choice Films’ Below the Line Bootcamp at Umbra Stages, a not-for-profit program which brings in young adults to get a taste of — and some on-the-job training in — the film industry.

“We get them jobs as production assistants, we put them on an actual film set,” Glazer said. “It really becomes a crash course on how to be a production assistant and becomes on-the-job training. It’s free, all they need to have is a will and desire to explore it. And if they end up wanting to pursue a career, we offer our help as mentors.”

Dutchess County resident and actress Mary Stuart Masterson founded Stockade Works, a nonprofit organization based in Kingston with a similar goal to help train people to work in the film and television industry. Recent programs have included production accounting and hair and makeup.

Not to mention, once a familiar scene or locale is featured in a film or TV show, cultural tourists take wing and look for the spots where their favorite scenes were shot.

“More people have visited the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail Bridge than you can imagine after ‘A Quiet Place.’ It’s also in ‘I Know This Much Is True,’” Rejto said. “In Netflix’s ‘Things Heard and Seen,’ they used the Red Hook Library and Red Church in Tivoli so I’ve gotten a huge amount of inquiries about where those sets are.”

Rejto said the filming locations have become such a big part of tourism that the Hudson Valley Film Commission is exploring the opportunity to create a map.

You can’t beat the view

It’s no surprise the Hudson Valley provides a variety of environments to work with.

“The thing about the Hudson Valley is you can cheat almost any location,” Rejto said. “You can go to Orange County and the geography is completely different than Dutchess County, every county has a special topography that kind of offers something different.”

The expansion in production facilities like the Douglas House, a Rockland County location site with two floors completely open to shooting, provides even more opportunity, especially for crews looking for indoor and outdoor space to work with.

“I can tell you during the pandemic, when filming shut down in Manhattan, the studios had to go somewhere else,” said Heather Douglas, manager and co-owner of the Douglas House. “Rockland and the Hudson Valley are very accessible to Manhattan, but there’s more space to work with. When they’re not shooting a city scene, they’re coming to the suburbs which gives them more options.”

Collier, a sustainability focused production and design shop, chose Blauvelt because of the space, location in relation to resources, and the region’s overall beauty.

“It’s a beautiful place and I feel happy in mind, body and heart that we work here,” Collier said.

The sentiment was shared by Halmi, who is looking forward to Lionsgate’s opening on Oct. 1.

Once complete, the Yonkers studio will include five sound stages, three measuring 20,000 square feet and two at 10,000 square feet, as well as an operational backlot. The project received a sales and use tax exemption and a mortgage recording tax exemption from the Yonkers Industrial Development Agency.

There are already talks to bring film and/or television productions to Yonkers, however Halmi said he could not disclose what those projects are.

“The types of shows are bigger and more imaginative than five to 10 years ago and they require specific facilities that are only really found in London or Los Angeles,” he said. “Our mission is to build as many as we can. A studio, besides locking in production, also creates a lot of local jobs. People will move here, people will learn how to work there.”

“I think a lot has to do with how friendly the neighborhood and towns are to the industry,” said Heather Douglas. “I think New York in general has always been very film friendly and encouraging towns to be more open to it.”

Heather Clark covers business openings and closings throughout Westchester, Rockland and Putnam counties. Keep up on the latest comings and goings by joining our Facebook group at [What’s going there Westchester, Rockland, Putnam](#). Contact Clark via email, hclark@lohud.com.