



# BLACKSWAN

## Film: Film-Makers Cheer New Film Studio in Portland



Maine's largest film studio was officially opened today in Portland. The 43,000 square foot facility is the first of its scale in the state and has film industry professionals energized by the hope that it will provide a major boost to Maine's creative economy.

As Gov. John Baldacci cut the ribbon – or to be more accurate the symbolic strip of 16 millimeter film – Maine Studio was open for business.

“The Maine Studio's going to be bring under one roof some of Maine's most creative minds,” Baldacci said. Our media production professionals are among the best in the world, and the benefits to Maine of having a robust film industry are undeniable. Film production boosts our economy through direct spending, tourism and jobs.”

“I'm going to quote from a movie that was shot in 1989,” said Laurie Notch, President of Wasted Minds Media Group – a Maine-based production company that's going to be leasing space at the Maine Studio. “Anybody guess what that movie might be? There were a lot movies made in 1989. It had to do with dreams,” she hinted. “Field of Dreams! And what did they say? Build it and they will come, and that's what's happening here.”

Maine Studio is described as a one-stop shop for any type of media production, complete with office space, and ample room for all activities from pre- to post-production.

The venue was provided cheaply by local shipping firm Nappi Distributors, says John Seymore, Chief Operating Officer at Wasted Minds, in the hope it will stimulate the local economy — and that already seems to be happening. “We just got word this week that a two-hour television film out of Philadelphia has decided to come up here,” Seymore says.

Shooting for the project, he says, will start in Portland in October, and that wouldn't be happening without the new studio. “We were supposed to go to Philadelphia to film it in October, and they called the other day when they got the press release, and said ‘Why don't we move it to Maine and do it at your studio — it just seems like a smarter move.’”

“It’s got nice high ceilings, nice open wide space so you build a set, you can cordon off any area you want to and build a set,” says Maine-based independent film-maker Jennifer Porter, who is impressed by the studio. She says the ability to rent out studio space, complete with a fixed lighting rig, is a huge plus.

“It’s the setup that actually takes so much time and money in film-making, and time equals money in film so, that will end up saving a lot of money for film-makers to be able to set up here permanently,” Porter says.

But there are factors still holding Maine back when it comes to attracting film-makers to the state, says state representative Thomas Watson, a Bath Democrat. “So many of our neighboring states are doing so much more. They’re pulling business that should come to Maine, away.”

Watson’s referring to the lack of sizeable tax incentives in Maine for medium and large scale production companies. He sponsored a bill in the last legislative session which would have offered film-makers 20 percent of production costs.

But, this comes at a price – a \$4 million price to be exact, says Watson, as the rebates being offered to film-makers would have to come from the state budget. And in this economic climate, Watson knows his bill is going nowhere for the time being. “The prospect of finding that kind of money in today’s budget is probably nil. We can, however, do some other things without spending a lot of money to increase the attractiveness of Maine to film production companies.”

“What this is going to do without incentives is that it will bring the local community together and hopefully they’re able to use a facility that they didn’t have access to before,” says Maine film advocate and blogger Cameron Bonsey, who has worked tirelessly to try and promote the economic potential of Maine’s film industry.

He says the studio will be a great place to nurture home-grown talent. “And then you hope that they’re be able to keep it going until additional incentives pass. And then you start getting some big outside money coming in to fund these things. It’s just going to take time and patience.”

“The traditional economic sectors that we’ve relied on for so long — paper, agriculture, forestry — are in essence, one could argue, the businesses of the 20th century. The businesses of the 21st century are going to be around the creative economy,” predicts John Mahon, Dean of UMaine’s College of Business, Public Policy & Health.

Thanks in part to its remarkable scenery, Maine, he says, has huge potential as a film location, and policymakers, he argues, should do everything in their power to attract film-makers and their money to the state. If they can’t afford to offer cash rebates at the moment, they should get creative.

For example, he says, they could offer production companies payment in the form of free services. “For example you have the municipality provide the policing services free of charge and not bill them for it. You might provide some electrical services from the grid where they don’t pay for that usage and you work something else out.”

Meanwhile back at the Maine Studio, Wasted Minds Media Group has already started work preparing to shoot a pilot this Sunday for a reality TV show, to be followed next month by four short films.

by Tom Porter for The Maine Public Broadcasting Network

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