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Fishing for Production

Oregon's broad spectrum of programs and facilities are baiting more film and TV projects

• By Todd Longwell

A production coming to Oregon with an in-state spend of \$1 million dollars or more doesn't have to hire locally to qualify for the state's incentive program, but it's still likely to be staffed largely by Oregonians.

"Over the last eight or nine years, in excess of 85% of the crews on larger movies have been locals," says Tim Williams, exec director of Oregon Film, aka the Oregon Governor's Office of Film & Television.

"We have young members coming in all the time and a lot of them came in within the last few years," says Portland-based Sierra Bay Robinson, a veteran costume designer who now works full-

time as the southern business agent for IATSE Local 488. But she says it's hard to accurately measure the increase in membership for Oregon alone, since Local 488's jurisdiction includes three other states (Washington, Montana and northern Idaho).

Many states offering film and TV incentives pay lip service to workforce development, but few take it as seriously as the Beaver State does. In 2018, it launched the Oregon Media Pathways program, which trains people from historically disadvantaged communities for entry-level production jobs. It schools them in a wide variety of skills, both tech-

nical and social, including how to read call sheets, walkie talkie lingo, production workflow, safety and general set etiquette. Then it goes a step further and not only connects them with potential employers, but also reimburses the production company for their wages for a set period of time if they're hired.

Oregon Film runs the Pathways program in partnership with several outside organizations, including IATSE and nonprofits such as the trade organization Oregon Media Production Assn. and Outside the Frame, which provides homeless and marginalized people aged 16-30 the tools

to develop production skills and shoot their own films.

"When the program started out, it was really just focused on feature films," says Outside the Frame film career coordinator Maria Moreno. "But now we have expanded into placing folks on the commercial side, because advertising is a really big part of the industry here."

In November 2022, the state legislature passed a bill to create the new creative opportunity program. It gives Oregon Film \$375,000 annually to help fund preexisting initiatives, including Pathways, Outside the Frame, the Outdoor Adventure Film grant, the Tell Your Story grant and partnership programs such as CINE/SEEN, the BIPOC filmmaker grant and OMPA's creatives of color networking events, as well as new programs and partnerships with groups such as Desert Island Studios, Lion Speaks and the film programs at Southern Oregon U. and the Portland Art Museum Center for an Untold Tomorrow.

Oregon also has a growing physical infrastructure, including a wealth of big equipment rental houses such as Pacific Grip and Lighting, Gearhead Production Rentals and Koerner Camera, the latter of which stocks the latest high-end digital cinema cameras and lenses. But it's not exactly rich with soundstage facilities, and the ones it has tend to be on the small side, like Picture This Production Services and Stage and Coach Sarge Cine, which each have two stages, the biggest being Coach's 4,500 square foot stage. Currently, its largest facility is Vision Stages, in Troutdale, six miles east of Portland, which has four stages totaling 36,000 square feet of soundstage space, including a 13,000 square foot stage with 22-foot ceilings. Opened by location manager Dan Eason in 2021, it scored a coup when it hosted Nathan Fielder's HBO series "The Rehearsal."

"For a long time, we've had many different converted warehouses for soundstages," says Williams. "What we don't have is a purpose-built soundstage, and we're actively working to figure out how to do that." 🎬

↑ Nathan Fielder shot his HBO series, "The Rehearsal," at Vision Stages in Troutdale.