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Movie, TV filming in county creates buzz, economic impact

During Sunday's casting call for extras for the untitled Ramin Bahrani film currently filming in DeKalb County, Nicole Liddle half-joked that it would be exciting to see the back of her head in the movie.

"This doesn't really happen in DeKalb," she said of Sunday's filming and casting call at the Egyptian Theatre. "I definitely think for the area it's unique."

DeKalb County has received its share of exposure recently, from filming for the Bahrani movie – which stars Dennis Quaid and Zac Efron – in various DeKalb County locations, to last week's filming of scenes for the new NBC show "The Playboy Club" at the DeKalb County Courthouse in Sycamore.

Additionally, a scene for "Man of Steel" – the Warner Brothers' Superman remake directed by Zack Snyder and starring Kevin Costner, Diane Lane and Russell Crowe – was filmed Aug. 15 at Valley West Community Hospital in Sandwich, said Allison Bryan, public relations coordinator for KishHealth System.

Debbie Armstrong, executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said she began working with Bahrani and his film crew in April as they scouted the area for farmland and downtown areas suitable for filming. Producers were looking for a Midwestern, small-town area, "and we fit that perfectly," she said.

For filmmakers, tax credits in the state offer an attractive deal, said Betsy Steinberg, managing director of the Illinois Film Office. If a director hires Illinois residents to work on a project, he gets a 30 percent tax credit on those wages.

Additionally, the state gives a 30 percent tax credit on money spent locally on equipment and other items needed for film production, which helps the state's economy, Steinberg said.

"In order to lure people here and get them interested in doing that, we give them the tax credit," she said.

In the current economic climate, film crews make decisions on where to film based on tax credits in different states, Steinberg said. The economic impact brought to an area where filming occurs is, first and foremost, the benefit. Plus, it can present an opportunity to spur tourism, she said.

"The sort of ripple effect of something like this can really be large," she said.

Steinberg said movies are often filmed in Chicago, but it's nice to see other areas of the state get some exposure. She said producers for "Man of Steel" considered tax credits and searched for shooting locations that met their needs, finding the Chicagoland area perfect.

Armstrong said it's hard to determine a dollar amount for the local economic impact because of the filming because cast and crew not only stay in local hotels but also fill their gas tanks, shop and eat locally.

"It's a trickle down theory, and it's going throughout the entire county," Armstrong said. "Those are all dollars that are coming directly from this film crew brought to town by the CVB."

For the use of something such as a farmhouse and property, the production crew works out compensation and use with the owners. She wouldn't comment on whether an occupied farm property or a vacant one is being used for filming.

The scene filmed last month at Valley West for "Man of Steel" was a waiting room scene, Bryan said. She declined to comment on how much the hospital received for allowing the film crew to turn the space into a waiting room from the 1970s.

Hospital staff members had to rework life safety policies during the time that part of the hospital was occupied, she said, but it's an area of the hospital that's mostly administrative offices. She said the hospital participated as a fun, community project.

"How often does Kevin Costner and Diane Lane show up in Sandwich, Illinois?" she said. "This is kind of a once-in-a-lifetime event for a lot of people."

Tiffany Gerace, manager of the Sycamore Speedway, also declined to comment on the compensation received for Bahrani's film's use of the speedway. She said some regular drivers will take part in the figure-eight racing scenes, which will replicate a normal race night at the speedway.

Race scenes for the film, which Sunday's casting call sought extras for, will be filmed Oct. 8 at Sycamore Speedway. The

film's production supervisor Michele Baker said she was looking for extras to fill the stands of the speedway as well as people to fill certain speaking roles.

Messages left with DeKalb County Presiding Judge Kurt Klein regarding how much the county received for allowing filming in the courthouse were not returned. Klein's office said he was out of town, and other county officials referred requests for comment to Klein.

Potential extras provided contact information and had their photos taken Sunday during the casting call at the Egyptian Theatre. Many said they were excited about the prospect of being in a film, no matter how small the part.

"It's a bucket list thing for me," Mike Flores of DeKalb said.

"I haven't been discovered yet any other way," Joe Herrick of Genoa joked.

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