

LOCATION UPDATE: MASSACHUSETTS

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# Cinematic Spirit of Massachusetts

Bay state's incentives create thriving production industry as series, features take advantage of diverse locations, talent • *By Malina Saval*

It was the late 1990s and future Oscar-winning “CODA” filmmaker Siân Heder was ambling across Harvard Square, close to the home in which she grew up in Cambridge, Mass. There, near the Au Bon Pain sandwich shop on Brattle Street, Heder spotted two buddies from Cambridge Ringe and Latin School, then-unknowns Ben and Casey Affleck, shooting a scene for “Good Will Hunting,” the 1997 film that would score two Academy Awards, help usher in the era of Big Screen Boston and turn the Affleck brothers and Matt Damon, all actors in the movie and Massachusetts natives

↑  
The stately buildings of Cambridge prove to be popular filming spots.

(“Massholes” in the local vernacular), into giant Hollywood stars.

“I knew Ben and Casey from high school — their mom was my teacher in third and fifth grade,” Heder says. “I think I shouted at Ben, ‘Put me in your movie!’ And so I was an extra in ‘Good Will Hunting.’”

But filming in Massachusetts in the 1990s was exorbitantly cost-prohibitive. Save for about two weeks of gathering external footage, Gus Van Sant’s drama about a math genius-cum-M.I.T. janitor was shot primarily on a Toronto soundstage. Until then, with the exception of a few proj-

ects such as the 1992 Brendan Fraser-starrer “School Ties” (shot in Concord), most Massachusetts-set films and TV series — from “Cheers” to Sidney Lumet’s courtroom classic “The Verdict” — were filmed elsewhere.

That changed in 2006 when Massachusetts instituted its film tax credit initiative. Since then, filming in the state has ballooned, feeding not only the film industry at large, but local businesses and skilled professionals. Kenneth Lonergan’s 2016 tragedy “Manchester By the Sea,” which won the Oscar for screenplay (Lonergan) and lead actor (Casey Affleck) was

filmed in the eponymous seaside town, as well as in nearby Beverly, Essex, Swampscott, Lynn, Salem and Tewksbury. Bostonians — a moniker claimed by residents living anywhere from Boston proper to as far away as, say, 30 miles outside the city — are, by and large, fiercely proud people. Indeed, Casey Affleck felt a “sense of pride” for winning an Academy Award for playing a character born and raised in his home state.

“I don’t know if it means that things have changed, or that I’ve come a long way, or just that the only part that I’m really able to play convincingly is somebody from the exact place where I grew up — it’s a toss-up,” quips Affleck, whose first credited role was as a young Bobby Kennedy in the 1990 miniseries “The Kennedys of Massachusetts.”

“I’ve filmed about five or six movies in Boston and Massachusetts and, personally, it’s been a great experience for me,” Affleck continues. “I’ve done about half of those projects living with my mom, being around friends. It just makes a world of difference for me to be able to be at home and be connected to who I really am.”

Over the past decade alone, a high-profile slate of productions — “Don’t Look Up,” “Knives Out,” “American Hustle,” “The Tender Bar” — has turned Massachusetts into a New England bastion of showbiz, resulting in a financial boon impacting cities and towns from Ipswich (“Little Women” shot scenes at Crane’s Beach) to Taunton, where the Whittenton Mills Complex stood in for Dachau in Martin Scorsese’s “Shutter Island.” While filmed predominantly in Atlanta, Marvel’s “Summer Break,” the highly anticipated “Black Panther” sequel, shot scenes last summer in Worcester, Mass., and on the campus of MIT. HBO’s three-part, Emmy-winning series “Olive Kitteridge” was lensed in Massachusetts, along with Showtime’s “Dexter: New Blood.” And Hulu’s “Castle Rock,” based on myriad Stephen King stories, was shot both at New England Studios, a soundstage in Devens, a census-designated



area famed for its now-shuttered military based, and in Orange, a sleepy mill town about 72 miles northwest of Boston that functions as a stand-in for the fictitious Maine burgh in which King sets many of his works.

“Castle Rock” was the first episodic TV series to be shot in Massachusetts in more than 25 years.

“The first season of ‘Castle Rock’ generated 1,026 full-time jobs and \$69 million in economic activity across 210 cities and towns,” says Massachusetts Rep. Marjorie Decker, citing a study conducted by Industrial Economics Inc. “It also generated \$4.73 of economic activity for each \$1 of tax credit issued by the state.

“Filming has created a tremendous economic impact in

Massachusetts, and that’s been exciting,” she adds. “In addition to the economic impact, there’s been the cultural impact, so that’s really inspiring to the people in my state that have careers in writing, film production, the audio-visual space and all the various innovations that come out of film production.”

According to David Hartman, executive director at the Massachusetts Production Coalition, “Massachusetts has joined the top tier of the list of locations for filming, with over 30 major productions per year consistently and over \$3 billion in direct spending over the life of the incentive program since 2007.

“Thousands of news jobs have been created across a broad range

of sectors to support the growing industry,” he adds.

This growth, says Hartman, includes a “pipeline” of more than 4,000 students in film programs at over 20 colleges and universities state-wide, and an expanding post-production ecosystem. Per Lisa Strout, director of the Massachusetts Film Office, “the stage space in Massachusetts has doubled over the past year.” In addition to New England Studios, Red Sky Studios in Allston and Marina Studios in Quincy, a coastal suburb just south of Boston, are both in heavy demand. A second 25-acre campus of Red Sky Studios is currently under renovation in Foxboro, not far from Gillette Stadium (The second season of HBO Max’s “Julia” will shoot here). Marina Studios recently opened a satellite facility in Canton, with a third location to launch next year in Watertown, about nine miles due west of downtown Boston.

“We’re seeing dozens of new businesses opening or expanding in Massachusetts this year,” says Hartman. “Everything from stages and lighting to camera rentals and trucks and on and off-set services — you name it, it’s growing here.”

Prior to the film tax credit, Chris O’Donnell, Massachusetts-based business manager of the Intl. Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts Local 481, spent nearly 20 years as a boom operator traveling out of state for work.

“I lived in Massachusetts, but I almost never worked in Massachusetts,” says O’Donnell. “I would have to go to L.A., or New York. I’d fly to Toronto for a week and then come back to Massachusetts for a week or two to shoot exteriors. That changed dramatically in 2006 when we passed the first film tax credit. Immediately, there was an uptick in the amount of production. And then the credit improved even more in 2007, which led to even more production. When I first started out, my local [union] had 350 members. Now, there’s close to 1,300.”

While most of that growth took place between 2006-11, says O’Donnell, the tax credit program, made permanent last year, coupled with “demand in content from the streaming platforms,” has contributed to an additional spike in jobs centered around the Massachusetts film industry.

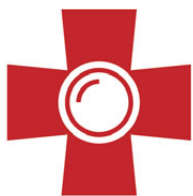
“We’re seeing more growth over the last two or three years than we did in the previous five or six years,” O’Donnell says.

The tax credit has widened the pool of local acting talent. Per Jessica Maher, executive director, New England Local SAG-AFTRA, “We have about 3,700 SAG-AFTRA members in New England, of which about 2,200 that are Massachusetts members.

“There’s definitely a collective sense of pride and importance in building up the roster of acting talent here in Massachusetts,” says Maher.

↑ Bill Skarsgård stars in “Castle Rock,” a production that helped take Massachusetts production to a new level.

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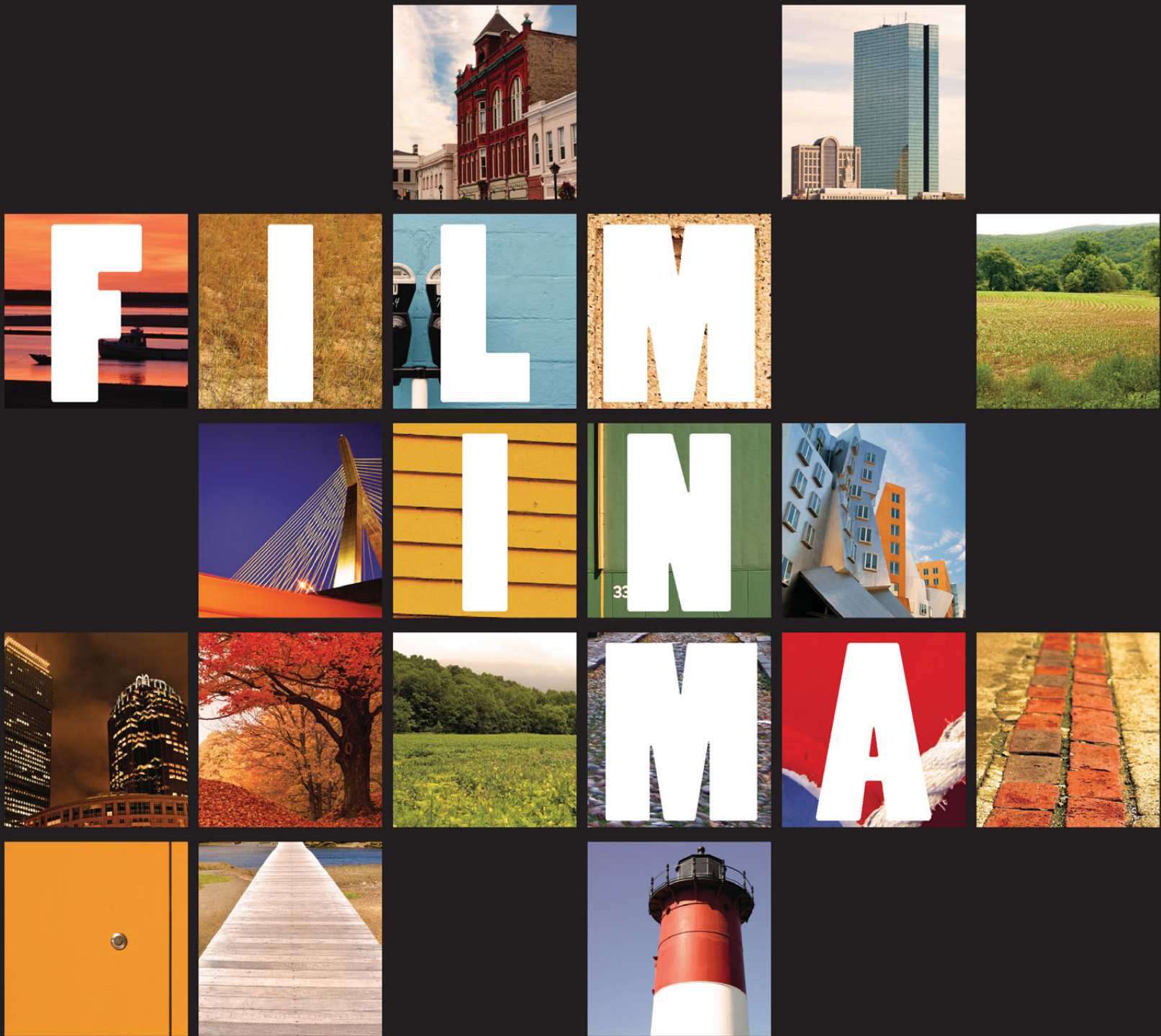
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With its disparate topography — from the rolling mountains of the Berkshires to the swampy marshes and cranberry bogs of Cape Cod, not to mention its plethora of historic landmarks — Massachusetts' aesthetic appeal is also a cinematic draw. The tax credit has enabled filmmakers to make ample use of this geographic and architectural bounty — and not just for films that take place in Massachusetts. Boston stood in for Paris in Shawn Levy's comedy "The Pink Panther" and Revere Beach (America's first public beach) was transformed into Miami Beach for Scott Cooper's 2015 Whitey Bulger biopic, "Black Mass."

"Massachusetts has an unparalleled range of locations, from contemporary urban environments to rustic landscapes and oceanic scenery, to a really vast range of architecture from really specific periods of history, from colonial to modern," says Hartman. "Massachusetts provides a really great canvas for filmmakers and storytellers to bring their vision to life."

When adapting "CODA" from the French motion picture "La Famille Belier," Heder, who netted the Oscar for adapted screenplay, knew she wanted to film on location in Gloucester, a picturesque fishing town on the coast of Cape Ann where she spent many a childhood summer vacationing.

"Gloucester's a very cinematic place — the rocky coastline, the woods leading up to those sheer cliffs and 100-foot deep quarries," says Heder. "It's all very vivid for me. Gloucester to me was a character in this film. And I liked the juxtaposition of this very picturesque, very beautiful New England town with this working-class, hardscrabble vibe."

In "CODA," which centers on Ruby Rossi (Emilia Jones), the only hearing member of a Deaf family running a flailing fishing business, Heder was intent on capturing the struggles of the working class. Gloucester, an historic epicenter of the New England fishing industry, provided the ideal backdrop for telling that story.

"Going to Gloucester as a kid, I watched as the fishing industry took a big hit," she says. "I think 20 years ago there were 700 boats out in the harbor that were actively fishing — and now there are six. And it wasn't just the fishing industry that collapsed, but all of the businesses that cater to that industry — the coffee shops that served fishermen in the morning, the fish-processing plants. So much of the economy of the town was dependent on that. And then, of course, what also factored in [as I was writing] was the way in which Gloucester reinvented itself more as a tourist destination."

For Affleck, the opportunity to shoot movies about Massachusetts in Massachusetts — to achieve that believability, to increase that breadth of cultural inclusivity — cannot be oversold.

"A diversity of locations means a diversity of people, diversity of ideas, diversity of life," he says.

Perhaps most importantly, more projects filming in Massachusetts means more kids harboring dreams of working in showbiz

will have a chance to do so right in their own backyards. Just as Affleck did when he was a fledgling young actor filming "Good Will Hunting" in Harvard Square.

"More movies means more trained professionals that have more to give back to kids in public school programs. I've seen it firsthand. Last summer, I was back in Massachusetts, and I visited this really cool program in East Cambridge that taught kids how to film, do podcasts and put together media projects. If there was no one filming in Massachusetts, they wouldn't have these people who can spend the day with kids who otherwise don't have access to that education.

"When you get 20 kids who have just experienced a full day with a professional director or actor — that makes a big difference. They get excited. They learn a lot. They feel like they have a pathway to a career. I'm not discounting the importance of job creation, but this other stuff that I have seen happen—that's the most touching." 🎬

↓  
The town of Gloucester hosted the shoot for Oscar-winning "CODA."





# THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FILMING IN

# *Massachusetts*



**LISA STROUT**  
DIRECTOR,  
MASSACHUSETTS  
FILM OFFICE

Lisa has been the director of the office since 2010. She is the former director of the New Mexico Film Office, L.A. & Boston location manager and AFCEI board member.

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to shoot  
anything  
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to series to  
commercials.*

## GENEROUS TAX CREDITS

Massachusetts offers a clear and competitive tax credit advantage that includes 25% payroll and production tax credits, plus a sales tax exemption. All above-the-line and below-the-line expenses qualify regardless of residency. There are no caps per year, per project, or per individual as long as 75% of principal photography is filmed in Massachusetts. Credits are refundable and transferable. The minimum spend of only \$50,000 to qualify makes it highly accessible.

## MORE SOUND STAGES AND EXPANDING PRODUCTION SUPPORT

It's all here. Our infrastructure is rapidly growing to meet demand for more permanent production facilities in the state. Available soundstage space has doubled over the past year with several new facilities opening and even more purpose-built facilities in development right now. Massachusetts also offers abundant unique stage solutions from airport hangers, to retrofitted warehouses and more that have housed everything from blockbuster tent-poles and streaming series to indies. Massachusetts vendors are making major investments across the board in stages and state-of-the-art equipment to serve productions for the long-term.

## WORLD-CLASS CREW AND TALENT

Massachusetts is home to a large world-class crew and talent base of highly experienced, knowledgeable, and hard-working people capable of making productions of every size and shape possible which has been key to driving producers to return to Massachusetts again and again. The pipeline of talent in our skilled and educated workforce that flows from over 30 area

colleges and trade schools is unique to anywhere else in the world. Our culturally diverse range of principal and background talent found here can bring characters of every accent to life from every corner of the world and neighborhood.

## WIDE RANGE OF LOCATIONS

Our canvas, your vision! Massachusetts boasts a wide array of incredible locations and architecture to bring amazing stories to life. From stunning seascapes to the east and rolling hills to the west, from castles to skyscrapers, Massachusetts offers everything you need spanning contemporary urban environments to period architecture and rustic towns all within a close proximity. We've doubled as Paris and New York, we've pretended to be Detroit in the '60s and Miami Beach in the '80s. We have versatile locations that can double for anywhere in the world at nearly any point from history to the current day. The variety of looks that can be achieved here is unparalleled. We specialize in finding real world locations to fit the vision that exists in a director's imagination.

## STATE-OF-THE-ART VFX AND POST-PRODUCTION

Everything you need is right here. Massachusetts is home to a robust ecosystem of post-production, audio, and visual effects companies. From dailies and color correction, to ADR, animation, and VFX houses with the most advanced capabilities in the world, you will find world-class technical and logistical support to bring the most complicated scenes to life. As a leading hub of technology and innovation Massachusetts is recognized for its cutting-edge digital arts talent and a complete production center built for the future.



GREAT HOUSE AT CASTLE HILL



# Marina Studios Offers Safe Harbor

The biggest soundstage in the state gives productions what they need

and want in the Boston area • By Carole Horst

**Marina Cappi** read all the signs: film and series production in Massachusetts was increasing, lawmakers extended the state's very attractive production credit and there was a desperate need for soundstage space. To commercial real estate veteran Cappi, building a soundstage and studio campus made good business sense.

Marina Studios — the only dedicated soundstage near Boston — opened in 2021 in Quincy, Mass.' Marina Bay, offering over 26,000 square-feet of space just a 12-minute drive from Logan Intl. Airport. The Marina Studios campus also

↓  
Marina Cappi saw a need for soundstages in the Boston area and launched Marina Studios.

includes 15,000 square-feet of multi-use production office and a 3-acre backlot. There's also new housing nearby that offers short-term leases, restaurants, markets and other amenities.

Marina Studios is already booked through 2026, and the fact that Massachusetts made the generous tax credits permanent — a tax credit equal to 25% of spend in Massachusetts, as long as 75% of production costs are spent in the state — has also leveled up Marina's ambitions: plans are underway to build additional soundstage and studio space in

two more suburban Boston locations: Watertown and Canton, which will host a 30,000-sq.-ft. studio set to open this year.

"They're the largest single soundstage in the state from a single-stage perspective, and then we offer the production offices and backlot with everything from preferred equipment vendors so that we can make it seamless, and hotels that we've partnered with — we help with anything a production needs," Cappi says.

"I Wanna Dance With Somebody," the Whitney Houston biopic directed by Kasi Lemmons and written by Anthony McCarten, was the first big feature to use the space. Compelling Pictures, where Cappi serves as an exec producer, is one of the entities behind the film.

The Whitney Houston film created a big splash, and now "because of the tax credit, there's more job security here. So a lot of crew don't have to travel anymore. It's really allowing for people to stay here or move here for the job," Cappi says.

McCarten is back at Marina as the writer of "The Collaboration," exec produced by Cappi and Josh Crook and produced by Denis O'Sullivan. The story revolves around the friendship of artists Andy Warhol and Jean Michel Basquiat, and will begin filming at Marina in the fall.

"We're excitedly gearing up to co-finance and shoot 'The Collaboration' this fall in one of our newest state-of-the-art soundstages at Marina Studios. ... We couldn't be more thrilled to work with Anthony again after becoming great friends and collaborators on 'I Wanna Dance With Some-

body,' and long-admiring his string of box office hits 'Bohemian Rhapsody,' 'Darkest Hour' and 'The Theory of Everything,'" Cappi says.

You can build a soundstage, but crew depth is critical. And while the state has a lot of pros who've worked on such features as "CODA," "Free Guy" and "Little Women," Marina is creating an internship program, and reaching out to the myriad universities and high schools in the area. "We're starting an internship program with the local high schools, and then with the city through Boston Arts Academy."

She wants young people in the area to apprentice with unions and get good jobs in the entertainment business without having to go to college "because a lot of people think it's too much of a barrier to entry and it's really not," she notes.

"It's about getting everyone in the same room, figuring out how this program can work for with the unions and then what protocols need to be done whether you're a student or you're an adult, how you get the training to become a permanent crew member. It's really important to us."

Cappi notes, "We actually became a member of Women in Film, worked with them, and McKenzie [O'Connell, Marina Studios COO] and I gave a keynote speech for their big conference. ... I think that's a great step because there's already a community based here in Massachusetts that directly addresses women" in the business. Her goal is to not only build studios, but also to produce.

Marina Studios is backing "Daddy Issues," starring Katie Crook and produced by Denis O'Sullivan. The story revolves around the friendship of artists Andy Warhol and Jean Michel Basquiat, and will begin filming at Marina in the fall.

"I've really been able to engage with female producers and directors, and the landscape is so much moving towards women in this industry, which is why I think that my timing was very interesting, because we've all seemed to have found each other and ... women are approaching me. And it's been really, really neat to learn it, but to do it with these powerful females." 🎬





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# Solid State Technology Boosts VFX

Massachusetts sees more post-production talent headed to regional shingles • By Gregg Goldstein



← Boston's Zero VFX has emerged as a regional leader in the field.

**Let's face it:** Massachusetts is not well-known for its post-production facilities. While there are a few impressive Boston-based companies — including Soundtrack Group for ADR/sound, EditBar for editing, Color Refinery for color and Brickyard VFX for effects — their efforts are mainly focused on commercials projects. Most features and series that film in the state head elsewhere for post.

But that's starting to change, thanks in large part to state tax incentives becoming permanent last year, and companies including Zero VFX emerging as leaders in New England.

"When we started in 2010, people would look at you very strangely if you said, 'We're doing our effects in Boston,' because there wasn't a ton of talent here," says Zero VFX co-founder Brian Drewes. "The incentive has really started allowing us to develop

a base of great artists." And to create groundbreaking work: he says Zero FX is now designing "synthetic photorealistic humans" for what he calls "the largest execution of this technique ever done in features."

There's no standalone tax incentive for VFX companies, "but we are able to leverage a piece of it for visual effects," Drewes says. "For productions shooting somewhere like Atlanta or Canada, if Zero gets a piece of the visual effects work or the whole movie, we get a 25% rebate on any of the salary costs that we incur within Massachusetts. We extend that to our clients as a 25% discount for expected salary costs, so it functions as if it's a VFX-only credit."

Drewes cites the launch of "The Equalizer" franchise in 2014 as a turning point in attracting VFX talent from Vancouver and L.A., with more "coming from the colleges, technological research

and high-tech industries here." (A third "Equalizer" film starring Denzel Washington is set for release in September 2023). Zero, which has some 85 employees,

↓ Zero VFX added sky and water to a shot on the Netflix horror series "Midnight Mass."



is now supervising VFX on two high-profile features made in the state: the Zendaya-led tennis drama "Challengers" and the Whitney Houston biopic "I Wanna Dance With Somebody."

Massachusetts has one long-time model for start-to-finish services: WGBH Production Group, which produces PBS shows such as "Frontline" and provides post-production facilities for independent filmmakers, documentarians and producers.

But the earliest wizard leading technical geniuses there was VFX pioneer Douglas Trumbull ("2001," "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Blade Runner"), who passed away in February at age 79. When he moved from Hollywood in the '80s to the Berkshires in western Massachusetts, he helped attract talents including Diane Pearlman, exec producer and general manager of the now-shuttered VFX studio Mass.Illusion ("The Matrix").

Pearlman now heads the Berkshire Film and Media Collaborative, a nonprofit promoting and facilitating production in the area, and is exec producer of DisruptAR, a commercial virtual production and augmented reality studio founded by long-time Trumbull collaborator Paul Lacombe. The VFX outfit Cadence Effects moved from Pittsfield, Mass., to New Lebanon, N.Y., for New York tax credits years ago, but they now do work in both states. And Pearlman says local film professionals are in talks to revive Trumbull Studios, a 45-acre Berkshires complex that includes post-production offices and a virtual film production stage.

They hope to advance Douglas Trumbull innovations including Magi cinema, a way of shooting and projecting films in 4K 3-D at 120 frames per second without the motion blur seen in other high-frame-rate technology. "We're talking with his wife, Julia, about what to do with the studio," Pearlman says. "She doesn't want to be in the film business anymore, but many of us want to carry on his legacy and see it continue as a studio that does cutting-edge work in the industry." 📍





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## Incentive Changes Boost Biz

Massachusetts makes program permanent, which triggers influx of big-budget series and features • By Gregg Goldstein

**Imagine a new** big-screen version of the infamous Boston Strangler case, filmed in... Cleveland. Or an organized crime thriller based in America's top fishing port, New Bedford, Mass., shot on location in... Halifax.

Both of these scenarios nearly happened. But thanks to passionate filmmakers and state tax credits, moviegoers will get to see a serial killer and more "CODA"-style fishermen in their natural habitat: Massachusetts.

Not since the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock have so many impactful visitors descended on the state. In addition to 20th Century's "Boston Strangler" and Paramount+'s \$28 million thriller "Finestkind," two Marvel blockbusters (Disney's "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" and Sony's Spider-Man spinoff "Madame Web"), director-star Bradley Cooper's Leonard Bernstein biopic "Maestro," the Zendaya-topped tennis drama "Challengers," the Whitney

↑  
"Finestkind" director Brian Helgeland (third from left) and producer Gary Foster (third from right) on location at the Scituate Lighthouse in Scituate, Mass., insisted on filming in Massachusetts.

Houston biopic "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" and more are being made there.

Massachusetts Production Coalition exec director David Hartman notes that the state attracts around 30 productions a year, totaling more than \$3 billion in direct spending since the tax incentive program began in 2007. And from the time lawmakers voted to make it permanent last summer, with no cap on above-the-line talent — a feature that

attracted the all-star "Don't Look Up" to the state — much more business is likely coming under the helpful direction of Massachusetts Film Office director Lisa W. Strout.

"Things started to change for us in 2017, when we had the first episodic series shot in Massachusetts in over 20 years, Hulu's 'Castle Rock,' and they came back for Season 2," says Intl. Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts Local 481 busi-



ness manager Chris O'Donnell. "Since then, we've had more than a half dozen series shoot in Massachusetts. That really has been an edge of growth, not only in our crew base, but also in terms of businesses and vendors and the industry expanding to fill that increased need."

For the small screen, New Line's horror comedy "The Parenting" with Brian Cox, Edie Falco and Lisa Kudrow and Season 2 of the Julia Child biopic series "Julia" are filming for HBO Max. AMC is also doing double duty: after wrapping Season 2 of the dramedy "Kevin Can F\*\*\* Himself" in May, a lot of the same crew will shoot Season 1 of the 1930s-era psychological thriller "Invitation to a Bonfire" in September.

"We're living in a world with over a hundred incentives, and more competition for films and series than ever," says Jay Roewe, senior VP of incentives & production planning for HBO and HBO Max. "So we usually see at least two to four different locations based on that, factoring in where the story is set, what the stage and crew situation is, the time of the year and so on. Because 'Julia' is set there, the state has one of the strongest incentives in the country and they've done away with the sunset, which is always an issue for a series to do multiple seasons, there wasn't a lot of

twisting of arms, either on the studio or filmmaker side."

The result: in Season 1 of "Julia," HBO Max spent around \$52.4 million on 440 vendors and added 528 jobs out of 834 total hires, excluding extras. "We feel very good coming here now because of the quality of the crews and the infrastructure," Roewe says. His only caveat? Like many shows, "Julia" films interiors in converted warehouse space just outside of Boston. "There's just a need for more soundstages. Because of the way the incentive was structured, there'd been some hesitancy to look at a long-term vision, but those are the kind of things that we expect to see more of here in the future." (That is also changing with New England Studios, Red Sky Studios in Allston and Marina Studios all expanding or planning to expand.)

For writer-director Brian Helgeland's "Finestkind," which will bow with a hybrid Paramount+/theatrical run, shooting in his New Bedford hometown was essential. "There was pressure to try to do it a different way, and we went up to Halifax, Nova Scotia, as a courtesy, but Brian made it clear — and I supported him a hundred percent — that unless the movie was shot in Massachusetts, he wasn't interested in making it," says producer Gary Foster of Krasnoff/Foster Entertainment.

→ Many of the Bay state crew that worked on AMC's "Kevin Can F\*\*\* Himself" are moving to the net's "Invitation to a Bonfire."



↓ HBO Max's "Julia" gave a boost to Massachusetts production.

But in order to make the budget work, they needed to learn more about the lay of the land.

"New Bedford is outside of 'the zone.' It's considered a distant location, and travel time, hotels and living expenses all add up," Foster says. "So we put our production office in Stoughton, with closer proximity to New Bedford, which meant the drive was shorter and we're paying less extra time on the day. All the unions and the crews understood it, so that helped.

"The other thing we discovered is that location fees close to Boston are quite high. Down here, there's not as much production, so fees are approximately 40%-50% less, and infrastructure costs aren't as high. That's how we got an extra week or so in New Bedford" on the 40-day shoot. "The local government, authorities and private citizens were so thrilled to have us, we were able to make better deals than if we were shooting near Boston. There are also fantastic crews here, so you're bringing in fewer people from L.A. and New York to fill out your departments."

It also pays to learn more about worker availability in advance. "Somebody was telling me the other day that Massachusetts has about three crews," Foster says. "If you come here and two or three things are shooting, suddenly you have holes in departments. There were a couple other movies that were contemplating coming here, but we got here first and started making commitments first, so timing is everything."

Colin Walsh, exec producer of AMC's "Kevin" (where he just

wrapped filming with around 300 people a week) and co-exec producer of "Bonfire," has done local productions for nearly two decades. He has a slightly different view on staffing than what Foster was told. "Our biggest thing is having a very strong local crew base. With certain departments, there are probably three very solid options. With others, there's more than three," he says. "Being a freelance business, the timing is always different. The crews intermingle quite a bit, so people go back and forth and work with different people on different shows."

And despite stories about "The Godfather" filming around real mobsters in 1970s New York, local wiseguys in Boston don't give anyone much trouble. "It only happened to me once, on [the Whitey Bulger gangster biopic] 'Black Mass,' and it wasn't a big deal," says longtime area location manager and producer Ryan B. Cook. "Someone who owned some property said, 'Our family's kind of connected to that storyline. We're not interested in being involved in it.' It was random, so we just moved down the street."

But he was relieved to help bring another true crime story from the early 1960s back to life on "Boston Strangler." "They were scouting Boston and Cleveland for the movie, and it would be criminal to have that shot in Cleveland," Cook laughs. "It was unique and special to be working on a movie where you could scout the real locations and say, this is where this event really happened. There are only so many iconic Boston stories that have yet to be told." 📍







# Film Tourists Flock to the Bay State

Fans seek out sites from classics such as ‘Jaws’ and ‘Cheers’ to recent faves ‘Little Women’ and ‘Free Guy’ • *By Kathy A. McDonald*

**Think of Massachusetts** as Hollywood Northeast. The state’s scenic, urban and historic settings suit all genres and appeal to filmmakers looking for authenticity, from the choppy waters of Martha’s Vineyard, where Bruce the shark terrorized beachgoers in the blockbuster thriller “Jaws,” to downtown Boston’s office buildings, where Ryan Reynolds’ “Free Guy” transformed the streetscapes.

“Film tourism is a happy benefit of productions,” says John Alzapiedi, assistant director of the Massachusetts Film Office. Although the film office does not track film tourism per se, and visitors may not initially consider the Bay state primarily as a film tourism destination — in comparison to production hubs like Los Angeles, New York or London — there are enough popular films and the long-running “Cheers” sitcom to

draw attention. The Bull & Finch bar across from the Boston Commons, known universally as the “Cheers” bar because its façade is featured prominently in the sitcom’s opening credits, buzzes today with fans even though the last original episode of “Cheers” aired in 1993.

On Locations Tours’ Boston Movie Mile walking tour ends outside the famed bar with participants encouraged to sing the hit show’s theme. The show forever changed the neighborhood bar’s fortunes: now it’s among 30-plus film/TV locations cited on the tour, which traverses the Boston Public Garden (the “Good Will Hunting” bench near the swan boats is ready for its close-up), Boston Commons (“The Departed” cast played rugby here) and Beacon Hill (“A Civil Action” shot in a storied alley).

↑ Boston’s famous Fairmont Copley Plaza has appeared in many films and TV series.

→ Contessa, the rooftop restaurant at the Newbury Boston, features great views.

Massachusetts’ robust film incentives guarantee more locations will soon be must-see. HBO Max’s “Julia” filmed on the Public Garden’s picturesque bridge; in the Back Bay, the eight-part series made significant use of the Fairmont Copley Plaza’s Oval Ballroom and Presidential Suite. The 110-year old property is a director’s dream because of its high ceilings and gilded public spaces: its Grand Ballroom hosted a major moment in Greta Gerwig’s 2019 “Little Women.” (The film office created a map of film locations for the classic that’s available in several languages.)

“It’s such an iconic hotel that epitomizes Boston,” says Ellen Ryan, regional director of sales & marketing, Fairmont Copley Plaza, of the hotel’s distinctive look and ornate early 20th century interiors. Ryan says guests will bring in a photo from “American Hustle,” (Amy Adams and Christian Bale dance under the lobby’s mirrored coffered ceiling) and request a photo of the featured spot in the hotel.

Look for the Copley next in the Will Ferrell and Ryan Reynolds starrer “Spirited,” and the hotel’s Oak Room bar/restaurant along with Jon Hamm in “Confess, Fletch.”

Top-tier talent including Hamm, Jennifer Lawrence (in Boston for “Don’t Look Up”) and George Clooney (“The Tender Bar” lensed on the nearby North Shore) typically lease private homes when on location

for extended periods. However, Boston’s list of luxury hotels with world-class amenities and A-list appeal continues to expand. The 286-room Newbury Boston (across from the Public Garden and on Newbury Street, Zendaya’s go-to shopping street while filming “Challengers”) is outfitted with a remarkable contemporary art collection and has the city’s hottest and most stylish restaurant, Contessa from Major Food Group, on its view-rich, weather-proof rooftop. Serenely decorated corner suites have ultimate Boston views of classic brownstones and the Common.

The 215-room Four Seasons Dalton, located within an oval-shaped, 61-story tower, has an equally curvy indoor pool and is home to the buzzy Japanese restaurant, Zuma. The Langham Boston recently emerged from a two-year renovation and is the only hotel with a private screening room: the plush, eight-seat Cinema Suite.

Will the summer bring film tourists to Gloucester for Oscar best picture winner “CODA’s” seaside settings?

Visitors reliably seek out “Jaws” locations on Martha’s Vineyard. Events are already in the works for its 50th anniversary in 2025. “It will be a big thing on the island,” says Carolina Cooney, exec director of Martha’s Vineyard’s Chamber of Commerce. “The film has had a lasting influence on the island and tourism.”





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