

Georgia is the **GETTING** **PICTURE**

Film and video producers find state's pool of professionals a star attraction

By **Laura Raines**
For *ajcjobs*

Matthew McConaughey gets all the publicity when Hollywood comes to Atlanta to shoot a major film like "We Are Marshall." But the real stars of Georgia's film and video industry are the more than 3,000 experienced professionals who work behind the scenes and cameras to make movies, commercials, videos and TV programs, as well as games and other interactive entertainment media.

"A movie set requires a small army of people with lots of heavy equipment," said Bill Thompson, new director of the Georgia Film, Video and Music Office within the Georgia Department of Economic Development. Film and TV producers have a tough time controlling costs if they have to transport crews and equipment across the country. The goal is to come with a few key players and hire locally for other needs.

For the budget to work, the location's climate has to be favorable, both literally and figuratively. The state's 2005 Georgia Entertainment

Investment Act, which offers tax incentives to filmmakers who work in Georgia, already is attracting more attention from Hollywood.

"We're still tallying the numbers, but we know many more projects were shot in Georgia as a result of the incentives. We expect the economic impact to hit above \$300 million in 2006 — more than double 2005's figures," Thompson said.

Since other states also have incentives, industry experts say that Georgia's talent is what often cements the deal.

"One of our greatest marketing strengths is the depth and talent of our crew base in Georgia," Thompson said.

Georgia's film and video infrastructure includes more than 800 production service companies and 20 sound stages. Former Gov. Jimmy Carter established the Georgia Film, Video and Music Office in 1973 to help promote Georgia as

► See **FILM INDUSTRY**, page G4

► **WHY I LOVE MY JOB:** Geoff Parker, regional compliance officer for Section 8 housing, page G7.



LEITA COWART/Special

Scott Tigchelaar, head of RiverWood Studios, is involved in building a back lot with historic-looking buildings in Senoia. "Most major studios in Hollywood have bulldozed their back lots because the real estate was so valuable, so we're offering them an additional back lot," he said. "We believe it will be a fairly unique asset for Georgia and the industry."

Film industry

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a prime production location. Since then, more than 500 major motion pictures and television movies have been filmed in the state, as well as thousands of commercials and TV shows, generating more than \$3 billion for Georgia's economy.

Thompson's office spearheads marketing efforts, but he draws ample support from municipal film commissions, a savvy advisory commission made up of local professionals, strong film/video/technology training programs in Georgia postsecondary schools and active industry organizations such as IMAGE (Independent Media Artists of Georgia) and the Georgia Production Partnership.

If you want to work in pictures, you don't have to leave home.

"Atlanta has a great community, where people are willing to help newcomers in the industry. I have seen many leave here for L.A. and, after a couple of years, come back," said Tia Powell, publisher with Oz Publishing Inc., which produces the Georgia Film & Video Sourcebook, distributed by the state film office.

"The Georgia crew base is unmatched," she said. "Not only are they hard-working, talented and professional, but they have fun. Having a strong crew base most definitely helps in the decision of where a film is shot."

Powell, who began publishing the book 18 years ago, says "it has not stopped growing since it was born." Producers can find companies and individuals working in every category of preproduction, production support and post-production services, including casting, location management, sound, lighting, film editing, wardrobe stylists, caterers and equipment suppliers.

The list includes Jack English, a partner with Russ Jamieson of Broadcast Solutions/Panther Library. English filmed episodes of "First Flight" with astronaut Neil Armstrong for A&E in the late 1980s and helped NBC develop the 1996 Olympic Media Village. His company's high-quality aerial footage of Atlanta and other cities is a staple of film, TV and commercial makers.

"Because of his connections and expertise, a common answer to 'Where can I get it?' is 'You need to call Jack,'" Jamieson said.

English makes a living by working on a variety of local and national

ON THE WEB



► Georgia Film & Video Sourcebook
www.ozonline.tv

► C-47
www.cf47.com

► Georgia Game Developers Association
www.ggda.org

► Georgia Department of Economic Development
www.georgia.org/Business/FilmVideoMusic

► IMAGE
www.imagefv.org

► Georgia Production Partnership
www.georgiaproduction.org

projects and wearing several hats.

"There has been no better time to be in the media industry than now," he said. "The whole industry is growing, and some of the nicest things are happening in Georgia."

Filmmaker resources

Last year, Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB), Georgia State University's Digital Arts and Entertainment Lab, the Georgia Council for the Arts and the Georgia Film, Video and Music Office joined forces to launch C-47. In the industry, "C-47" is the term used for a clothespin, something every set needs for attaching filters and other equipment.

C-47 is designed to be a showcase, educational resource and social network to encourage and support filmmakers in the state. It calls for Georgia filmmakers to submit short films, which are reviewed by a jury of professionals. The best get exposure on the Web site and through GPB.

"The world of media is expanding in so many ways, and we want to grow our own talent," said Barbara O'Brien, senior education project manager at GPB. "Our goal is to augment the film festivals and other associations that exist, in order to infuse and build our film community. The response has been very positive."

Kim Turner, GPB project associate with C-47, said, "The talent pool is extraordinary in all facets." She described the films submitted as being diverse — urban, rural, personal, quirky and political.

"We're seeing people with a passion for the business and a cluster of skills, from traditional film to com-

puter graphics to gaming," O'Brien said.

Video gaming is growing around the world, and there are more than 50 Georgia companies involved in original content creation and production, Thompson said. They've formed the Georgia Game Developers Association.

Having a strong indigenous industry is extremely important and will attract more entertainment producers to Georgia, said Kay Beck, director of Georgia State's Digital Arts and Entertainment Lab and a member of the film office's advisory committee. Georgia State University has the largest film-production program in the Southeast, with more than 600 undergraduates.

"This is a clean industry that doesn't pollute, creates jobs, puts tax money in the coffers and has many residual benefits in terms of tourism and economic development," Beck said. "Production companies have to create a world when they make a movie, and our crews are well-known in Hollywood. Producers know they can get what they need here."

"There's no negative impact. They come, spend money and leave, and movie people are notorious for spending. Ben Affleck bought a house in Savannah," where his movie "Forces of Nature" was filmed, said Scott Tigchelaar, head of RiverWood Studios, a production facility 25 miles south of Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

What's next for state?

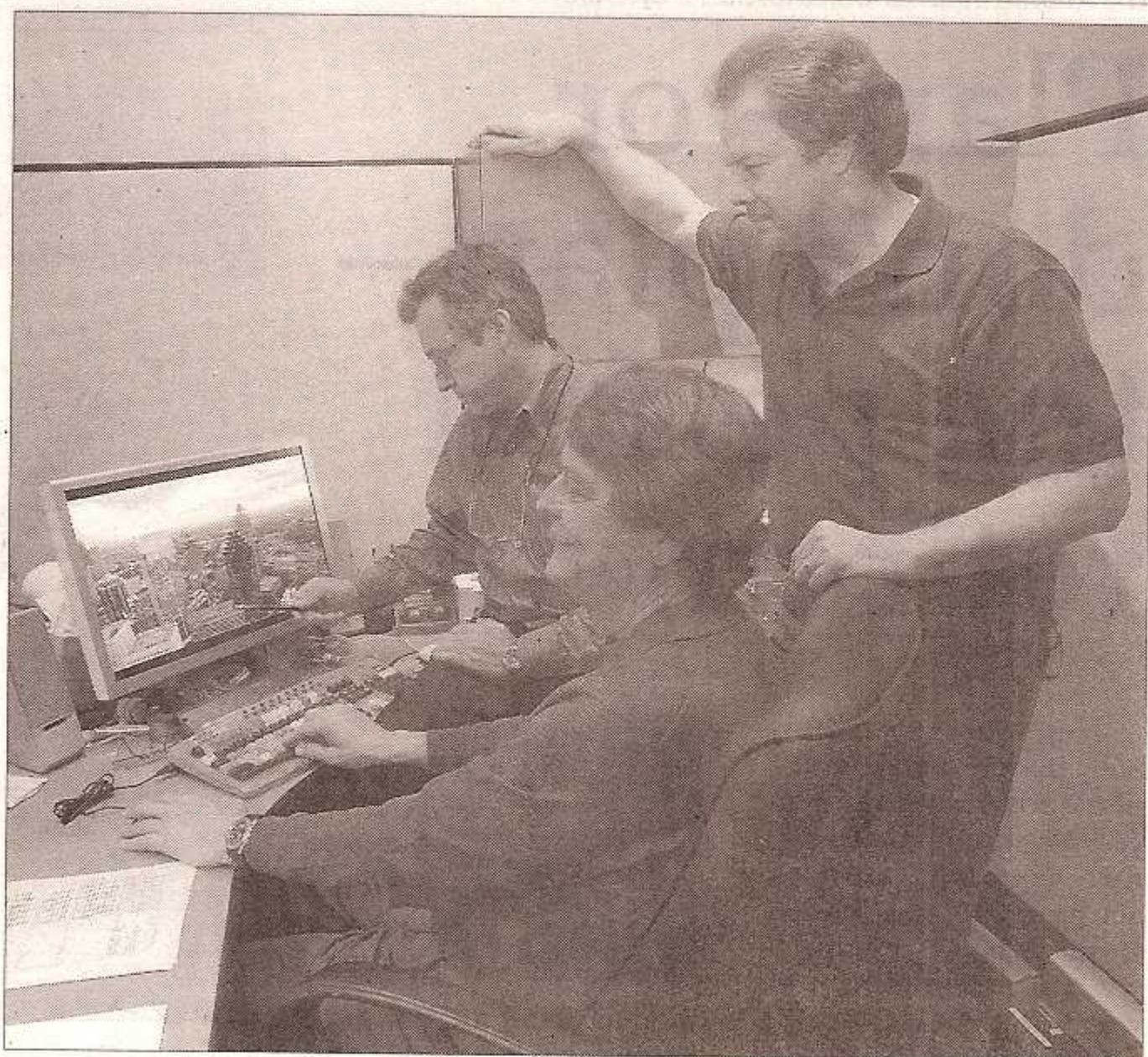
Although Georgia's climate has been welcoming, the number of Georgia-set films and TV programs dropped drastically in the '90s from the state's heyday of the 1970s.

"When movies began to move out of Hollywood for national locations, Atlanta had mild weather, better topography and was a right-to-work state [which made production cheaper]," Tigchelaar said. "In the '70s and '80s, Georgia got the lion's share of the business, running third in the nation after L.A. and New York." That's when Georgia built its film crew infrastructure.

Then in the mid-'90s, a weak dollar and tax incentives in Canada made it cheaper for companies to film there.

"Tax incentives changed Hollywood, and it isn't going to go back," Tigchelaar said. "For bigger projects, where to locate is a tax decision first and an artistic decision second."

Movie moguls look at the top three to five places with the best incentives where a project could work,



LEITA COWART/Special

Jack English (from left), director Jeff Jeffares and Russ Jamieson edit an aerial shot of Atlanta that they will lease to film companies. English and Jamieson are partners in Broadcast Solutions/Panther Library.

and Tigchelaar wants to see Georgia on that short list.

"While our industry is incredibly grateful for the incentives that were passed, and it has grown the economic impact by 200 percent, if you're asking if we could be even more competitive, the answer is 'absolutely,'" he said.

When Georgia started working on its entertainment tax incentives (about 9 percent, plus additional points for using Georgia workers and rural counties, which can bump the ante to 15 percent to 17 percent), only four states had tax incentives. By the time the legislation passed, 26 states had incentives in place — many at higher rates.

"The competitive range has shaken out at 20 [percent] to 30 percent," Tigchelaar said. Georgia has seen business move to Louisiana and other Southern states.

Tigchelaar explained that government leaders wanted to make sure that any tax incentives would be "revenue-positive" for the state but that, because of a lack of data, the percentage was based on an economic multiplier of 1.7 percent for every dollar spent.

"A new study by Cornell University justifies a multiplier of 3.1 percent, and if local research could back that up, I believe we could

justify something in the 25 percent range for tax incentives, and that would be very good for the state," he said. "We're in a good position right now, but going for that best position would create more jobs and make sure that we don't lose our infrastructure competitive edge."

Set in Senoia

RiverWood Studios and Historic Development Ventures is offering Hollywood an additional lure, with its plans to re-create the 19th-century town of Senoia with new commercial buildings and residences in historic styles. About 15 movies, including "Fried Green Tomatoes," have been shot in Senoia.

"Unlike many small towns, the look hasn't been spoiled yet [with modern infill], because six generations of families owned most of the land," Tigchelaar said. "Most major studios in Hollywood have bulldozed their back lots because the real estate was so valuable, so we're offering them an additional back lot."

"We believe it will be a fairly unique asset for Georgia and the industry."

Few industries can give a state such an economic shot in the arm as the film and entertainment industry, Tigchelaar said. "I believe we're on the comeback trail."