

## Location, Location, Location

# Riverwood Studios, Senoia, GA

## Setting the stage for historical filmmaking

By Ruksana Hussain

The development of a period back lot in historic Senoia is Georgia's next invitation for films to be shot here, thanks to Riverwood Studios. The studio has taken on this latest effort to lure several Hollywood projects, offering them a historic looking set of buildings and streets - a fairly unique asset for Georgia and the industry. Riverwood's existing studios include four massive soundstages, production offices, editing space, a screening room, a mill, and plenty of hair/make-up/wardrobe space.

For the back lot, Riverwood has acquired more than a dozen acres of developable land within the historic district of Senoia and has begun construction on the project, offering unique features designed to accommodate the practical needs of production crews. These include underground power lines and multiple shooting perspectives on each street.

In addition to the historic production facilities, Riverwood's new development will include live/work space including office, retail, and restaurant space, and renovation of older buildings. Presales of lofts, brownstones, and town homes are scheduled to begin by Summer 2007.

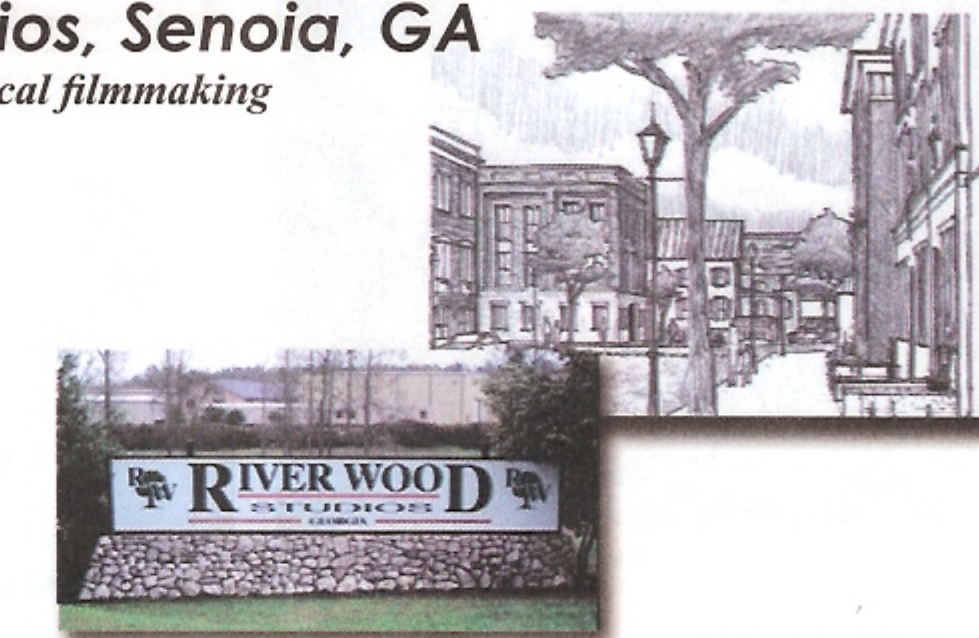
*Southern Screen Report* caught up with Scott Tigchelaar, President of Riverwood Studios, to find out more:

### How did the idea for a back lot in Senoia originate and why Senoia?

Senoia is a half-mile from the Riverwood Studios. Fifteen movies have been shot there in the last 15 years, so it was a natural choice for a place to do something like this because of its proximity and because it's a quaint little town, frozen in time. There is no real modern development in Senoia and that's part of the reason why it has been so attractive to the film industry over the years as a setting for producing pictures.

### What are the facilities Senoia will offer?

There is always demand for locations but we are building Senoia first and foremost as a development. What we are doing is building it with an eye to making it conducive to future film projects as well. We want 50 more films to be shot here, so we are making sure that everything we build is consistent with the historic period and look of the town. And we're laying it out



in such a way that it makes it easy to film. The best example of that is, we have alley access to all the homes and even the businesses so you can shut down a street for filming and it doesn't disrupt peoples' ability to get to their home. That's usually the biggest complaint when you are filming in a practical town. If you close the street off, the businesses and residents complain, since it restricts their access.

The other thing we are doing, within the context of the historic town, is to have a street of brownstones, a couple of streets of single family homes that approximate



Scott Tigchelaar

Charleston and Savannah, a street of live/work town homes, factory lofts, and things like that. By having brownstones, those fit within the context of a southern town but they also allow you to cheat New York. All you have to do is park a couple of New York cabs on the street, and nobody knows it's not New York. It might not work for every movie but for a film or television series working here and needing a New York looking street that will be available to them without having to go to New York. The same goes for Charleston and Savannah. Those are both heavy tourist areas and often they don't like their streets

being shut down for filming. And they're not as easy to get to as Senoia, which is just 25 miles away from the busiest airport in the world. There are also no direct flights to get to Charleston or Savannah from L.A., you have to go through Atlanta. So Senoia is all about being close to the infrastructure, the amenities, and logistical considerations of a place like Atlanta, but still being able to cheat a neighborhood like Charleston or Savannah.

We are doing this as a development. There will be places people are going to live, offices where they will work, restaurants where they will eat, and all that other stuff, but it will be just that much more conducive to film work and by having a studio a half-mile away.

### When is the back lot at Senoia expected to be ready for filming?

That's the beauty of it! There have already been 15 movies shot here so the town can already be used for filming. It's not like everybody has to wait till we are done with what we are doing. We'll just be adding to what's already there. But that being said, we have started construction, and based on the way the demand is going, we'll probably be done in two to three years. It's going relatively fast.

### Has there been any special interest in the new development?

There has been interest already from studios in Hollywood. We have met with them and showed them the renderings of the development. They're already talking about Senoia in terms of development for TV series. It's very easy to do a show

**Hey! Say you saw it in  
Southern Screen Report!**

## **Riverwood**

*Continued from Page 4*

like *Northern Exposure* or *Desperate Housewives* in a location like this. Some are already considering it in their development process for projects they are working on.

**Do you see any difference between Indie cinema and mainstream cinema in using this location?**

No, only that mainstream is more likely to be attracted at the studio level for TV series. But half the films shot in Senoia have been independent films, so we will always appeal to the independent category.

**How do you see this development contributing to better tax incentives for the film industry in Atlanta?**

A better bill for tax incentives was just passed so there is always hope for more. What was passed is outstanding and is going to set Georgia in a much more competitive position so it's all good. We will probably have more business in the next two years than we can handle, and that's good.

For more about the Senoia back lot development, see [www.riverwoodstudios.com](http://www.riverwoodstudios.com).