

Lights, Cameras ... Orlando

By Russ J.
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CENTRAL FLORIDA IS HOME TO A ROBUST TV, FILM AND COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION SCENE

» With the days of celluloid and reel-to-reel in the past, the film and television industry is evolving to new modes and production techniques. Thanks to diversification, adaptability, a hospitable environment, smart growth and dedicated industry professionals, that change bodes opportunity for Metro Orlando's thriving film industry.



Cinematographer Marty Mullin at work — Central Florida is a thriving film and television production destination.

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Though Metro Orlando has seen big-time Hollywood flicks such as *Parent-hood*, *The Waterboy* and *Monster* come to town to shoot, our market strength comes from smaller productions. "We can't compete for the \$200 million feature films," says Suzy Spang Allen, vice president of film & digital media development for the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission. "But we can go after the \$1 million to \$15 million feature films and compete line by line with producers willing to see that this is a very smart place to shoot a film or television series, or create original content for digital media applications."

Longtime Hollywood producer Alan Blomquist (*The Cider House Rules*, *Walk the Line*) is a recent convert to the region. He had such a positive experience here with *Larry the Cable Guy: Health Inspector* that he returned for his latest made-for-TV feature, *Bait Shop*. The majority of the bass-fishing comedy, starring Bill Engvall and Billy Ray Cyrus, was shot at Lake Toho in Kissimmee.

Blomquist returned for significant reasons, in addition to the area's agreeable January temperatures. "There's a crew base and a support system that's done movies before. You're not reinventing the wheel. I would definitely return to Central Florida. I think the film commission's great, and I'm very happy with the crew and the cast that I found."

Local filmmaker Todd Thompson agrees. "There are so many great crew, actors, post-production facilities and production equipment, there's no need to go anywhere else." His Celebration-based production company, Stars North, continues to rack up accolades and awards with short films such as *Time & Again* and other movie projects.

M.D.-turned-first-time-filmmaker Doug Gordon wrote and produced *RoboDoc* to vent his frustrations with the healthcare industry's current woes. The medical comedy was locally funded, produced, directed and filmed — essentially a homegrown product, which brought in Hollywood's Alan Thicke and David Faustino to star.

"The local government was extremely helpful with traffic situations while shooting scenes. We closed one

intersection for a full day along I-4," Gordon says of the cooperation he received from the City of Orlando. "Making a movie is never easy, but it was made pleasant by people in both the private and public sectors."

Still, the commercial market remains the 'bread and butter' of the local industry, with approximately 60 national spots rolling cameras here each year, according to Allen. "We have a strong crew base, we've got great support facilities and vendors, and we have a diversity of locations. Commercials go where the infrastructure is and where

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they get the most bang for their buck."

Many professional athletes have contract clauses allowing them to shoot their endorsements in the market in which they live. Orlando benefits from one of its most famous residents: Tiger Woods. The golfer, who reportedly makes more than \$100 million in annual endorsements, has starred in spots for Buick, Nike, American Express, EA Sports and other companies — all shot in Metro Orlando.

While the commercial industry has kept a steady pace, television production has evolved over the years. This region's television and film work follows industry trends, and the advent of reality TV proved a boon to Central Florida. "What television is today is very different than what it was 15 years ago," Allen explains. "Productions are no longer 200 people based on a stage for years at a time. They are 10-, 15-, 20-person crews in and out of a market constantly. We've benefited from that." Some of the productions filmed locally include *Dr. G: Medical Examiner*, *Nanny 911* and *Trading Spaces*. Additionally, numerous local production companies — such as Pink Sneakers Productions (*Cribs*, *Hogan Knows Best*) and Adrenaline Films (*Survivor*, *Looking for Stars*) — keep busy with reality TV projects.

Bridal Bootcamp, a reality series recently filmed in Lake County, brings together 10 brides-to-be in a *Survivor*-

like weight-loss competition, with the winner getting her dream wedding paid for and televised on national TV. Brent Montgomery of Leftfield Pictures in New York is the executive producer of the eight-episode series that airs this fall on CMT.

Film, animation and digital media programs at University of Central Florida, Full Sail University, DAVE School, Valencia and Seminole Community Colleges and others comprise an integral component of the region's support system. And with a \$845.5 million annual production market and with

more than 3,400 area employees engaged in film and television production-related activities, preparing tomorrow's professionals for the local sector is vital.

"You have the resources here to do and create anything you want, whether it's a feature film, commercial, TV series, game or medical simulation," Allen says. "But the health and growth of this industry will really come from the companies in our community." ✕



On set with local filmmaker Todd Thompson's Celebration-based production company Stars North, during the making of *This Man's Life*.