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Friday, January 17, 2014

Film, TV productions bolster Maryland's bottom line

Industry brings jobs and money to state

By Ryan Marshall Staff Writer

Jack Gerbes and the Maryland Film Office have had a good week.

On Sunday, Robin Wright captured a Best Actress Golden Globe for her role in "House of Cards," which was shot largely in Maryland and the upcoming season includes the House of Delegates chamber in Annapolis standing in for the U.S. Senate.

On Thursday, the film "Philomena," shot partially in Montgomery County, received four Academy Award nominations including for Best Picture and Best Actress for Judi Dench.

And on Saturday, the Susan Sarandon film "Ping Pong Summer," shot in Ocean City, is scheduled to make its premiere at the Sundance Film Festival.

Add in the fact that the American Film Institute recently named both "House of Cards" and the Maryland-based "Veep," starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus, to its list of Top 10 shows of 2013, and the film office has had a productive year.

Gerbes, the office's director, said that in fiscal 2013, the film industry in Maryland generated \$197 million through the production of both large and small films, commercials, industrial films and other works.



File Photo
British film crews shot part of "Philomena," starring Judi Dench, outside of St. Paul's Community Church in Poolesville in November 2012.

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The success of his office is evaluated by several factors, such as the number of Marylanders hired as actors, extras and crew for productions in the state, how much money productions spend in the state and how many Maryland businesses were utilized during the shoot.

The first season of "House of Cards" hired 2,198 actors extras and crew, Gerbes said.

The production also bought or rented goods or services from 1,814 Maryland businesses or vendors.

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Season One of "Veep" hired 978 Marylanders and patronized 1,141 Maryland businesses, Gerbes said.

Cities such as Baltimore and Annapolis have long been stand-ins for Washington, D.C., a tradition continued on "Veep" and "House of Cards."

The D.C. film office has a difficult job, Gerbes acknowledged, because the logistics of dealing with multiple local and federal jurisdictions and agencies in the nation's capital means that productions often find it easier to be based in Maryland and only go to D.C. for shots you can't get anywhere else, such as the monuments or other landmarks.

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Carol Flaisher, a Cabin John resident, served as the production supervisor and location manager for "Philomena."

She said Maryland offers a variety of settings, from cities to mountains and the Eastern Shore, as well as four distinct seasons.

"We have a fabulous autumn here," she said.

In 35 years in the business, the Walter Johnson High School graduate said she tries to bring as many productions as possible to Maryland.

"Whenever they want the rolling hills of Virginia, I bring them to Maryland," she said.

While most of "Philomena" was shot in England and Ireland, parts of the film were also shot in Bethesda, Darnestown, Gaithersburg, Potomac and Cabin John, Flaisher said.

The production definitely brought money into the local economy, with the cast and crew patronizing a variety of shops and businesses, she said.

Gerbes also addressed an item that has been making the rounds on the Internet and social media that featured a map of the U.S. with the best movie based in each state, as determined by Reddit user "Jakubisko."

The map listed "Silence of the Lambs" as the best movie based in Maryland.

But while his prison was supposedly located in Baltimore, Hannibal Lecter never consumed any fava beans or a nice Chianti in Maryland.

The website Internet Movie Database lists filming locations for "Silence of the Lambs" in the District, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Missouri, Tennessee and the Bahamas, but none in the Free State.

Gerbes likened choosing his favorite movie actually shot in Maryland to a parent trying to pick his favorite child.

"It's hard to choose, because we love them all," he said.

But he ultimately listed the 1995 Bruce Willis-Brad Pitt film "Twelve Monkeys," Will Smith's 1998 thriller "Enemy of the State" and 2004's "Ladder 49" starring John Travolta and Joaquin Phoenix as some of the productions he looks back on most fondly.

And also, "Just about any John Waters movie," he said.

He also singled out the classic Baltimore-based HBO series "The Wire," which had a notoriously fraught relationship with Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) when he was the city's mayor, as an outstanding Maryland-based production.

But Gerbes said while he's passionate about movies, the most important aspect of his job is bringing in productions that will create jobs and revenue in Maryland.

"When it comes down to it, it's jobs and stimulating our local economies," he said.

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