

Chicago's 2013 film revenues of \$358 million set a new record

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Published January 21, 2014

Film production last year was an exception year, says Chicago Film Office director Rich Moskal. "The busiest we've ever seen" and the biggest – with estimated revenues at \$358 million.

Overall production was up 20% over 2012 and total of 2,198 filming days and nearly 40% growth over the previous record in 2011.

"Our most impressive growth was in episodic television," Moskal says. "Scripted one-hour dramas increasingly see Chicago as a versatile, cinematic and affordable destination."

"It was a perfect combination," says Betsy Steinberg, head of the Illinois Film Office. "We have the stage space to accommodate multiple shows, a tax incentive that works very well for TV and all of our 2012 pilots were picked up for series."

Until the IFO completes its audit and releases spending totals in a few months, the CFO's figures for permitted days shot within city limits remain the best gauge of local activity.

NUMBER OF PROJECTS UP 20%

The 486 projects shot 2,198 days in 2013 were up about 20% from 406 shows that worked 1,808 days the year before.

Says Moskal: "Not only do the numbers reflect record high production volume, the scale and duration of these projects was just extraordinary: six simultaneous full-time TV series; three blockbuster features back-to-back; unprecedented commercial levels."

(A reminder: These stats are based on projects that obtained city permits. They do not reflect days filmed outside city limits, or in the city without permits).

DICK WOLF'S SERIES FILMED THE MOST DAYS

TV production rose to 66 shows that filmed 1,231 days in 2013, an impressive rise from 50 programs working 978 days in 2012.

This was led, of course, by NBC's Chicago Fire, which worked all year on two seasons, racking up 196 days. NBC also had Fire spinoff Chicago PD, which kicked off its first

season in September with 74 shoot days through year's end; and Crisis, which worked 65 days.

ABC's Betrayal and Mind Games each did 13 pilot days in April, and 110 and 86 days of their respectively first seasons in the second half of the year.

USA got in the game with its own Chicago first responder saga, Denis Leary's Sirens, which did 4 pilot reshoot days in March and a 42-day first season in September-October.

"The expansion of Cinespace Studios and the influential endorsement of two Dick Wolf series headquartering here has sent the entire industry a powerful message: Chicago is full service, highly functioning, and open for business."

UNSCRIPTED ADDED TO THE MIX

On the unscripted side, CNN's Chicagoland actually had the singlemost days of any show, at 215. Steve Harvey did two 45-day seasons for NBC, and DIY Networks's Kitchen Crashers shot a total of 67 days.

The other longest-shooting unscripted shows were Warner Bros.' Judge Mathis, 44 days, and Oxygen's Bad Girls Club, 44.

STUDIO FEATURES THE BIGGEST GROWTH

The biggest proportional year-to-year growth was actually in studio features, which nearly doubled work days. Three studio features shot 141 days in 2013 compared to just one studio feature that shot 72 days the year before.

In 2013 it was three sci-fi/futuristic epics: Lionsgate's young adult franchise launch Divergent, which filmed 71 days from April to July, with pickups in December; the Wachowskis' return to hometown production for Warner Bros.' Jupiter Ascending, 35 days in July-September.

Michael Bay's fourth Transformers outing for Paramount shot 32 days in August-October. Bay also shot two days on side project Cinema One. Warners' The Judge filmed for a day in September.

MODERATE GROWTH IN INDIES

On the independent side, growth was more modest: 23 features shot 116 days in 2013, up from 16 pictures that filmed 110 days in 2012.

The bigger indies, as per permitted shoot days, were Boris Wexler's Chat, 21 days in April-May; Scott Foley's Jessica, 15 days in August-September; Full Throttle's Prank, 14 days in July-August; Jack C. Newell's Open Tables, 13 days in April-June (they also filmed in Paris); and Collin Schiffli's addiction drama Animals, 12 days in September.

OPTIMUS LEADS IN SPOT PRODUCTION

Commercial production grew, too: 137 spots filmed 223 days in 2013, vs. 123 spots that did 209 days the year prior.

One at Optimus was the biggest player with 23 commercials shooting 37 days, for clients including Crystal Light, McDonalds, Coke, and Goose Island.

Story and LA-based Smuggler were also busy in town, with four spots and seven shoot days each, for clients including DiGiorno and Colgate respectively.

Motion Theory did two three-day shoots for XOM, Muster Master did four spots and five days for clients including Jim Beam, and O Positive did three spots and five days for clients including Kellogg's.

2014 POISED AS 'A TRUE PRODUCTION CENTER'

How does 2013's growth look to carry over into the coming years? "We can never take the business for granted," Moskal says, "but I do believe this reflects our greater capacity, a maturity of Chicago as a true production center.

"Producers always seek the most affordable options, and competition among cities worldwide has never been tougher. But the past two years have been an important step forward."

"All the major networks are considering Chicago for pilot season this spring," Moskal states. "And there's speculation of another Chicago Fire spin-off series. This year's theatrical releases of Divergent, Jupiter Ascending and Transformers 4 will be tremendous for us."

"As with the Dark Knight films and Transformers 3 previously, blockbuster exposure always generates industry interest. Success can excite greater success, and fortunately, we have a great story to tell."