



## **Film, TV flourishing**

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In December 2008, Illinois lawmakers enacted a 30 percent tax incentive for film and television productions in the state. The tax credit had little effect in 2009. In a bad economy, film and television starts fell, said Rich Moskal, director of the Chicago Film Office.

But pilot episodes for five television series have been or will be shot in Chicago in early 2010. "I can't think of a time when we've had as many television pilots shooting simultaneously," Moskal said.

That's not all. Two major Hollywood productions — Ron Howard's "Your Cheating Heart" and Michael Bay's "Transformers 3" — will shoot in Chicago this summer.

The independent film "Ca\$h," produced by Columbia College Chicago graduate Naveen Chathappuram, shot in Chicago in late 2007 and early 2008, opened last weekend.

Expect this flurry of activity to continue.

We often highlight all the things that state government does wrong. The tax credit is something lawmakers got just right — in size, scope and sustainability. It creates jobs without breaking the bank. And it has the potential to make Chicago not only a destination for big Hollywood productions, but also a center of independent film activity.

About 40 states offer tax rebates or credits for film and television projects. Illinois' is not the biggest. Michigan offers a whopping 42 percent credit. New York City offers 35 percent.

Wisely, Illinois lawmakers have not tried to outdo those competitors. Illinois' incentive is smaller and it's limited to in-state spending.

But lawmakers have made the tax credits stable and easy to access. By making the credits permanent, Illinois allowed producers to plan long term, which is especially valuable for television filming.

The state has also implemented the program well. While filmmakers have complained about having to wait for tax credits in other states, Illinois' process is quick and seamless, said Chathappuram, who received a 20 percent tax credit that was in place

when he made "Ca\$h."

That painlessness is key, particularly to smaller, independent productions.

So, too, are Chicago's resources.

John Boshier, a Columbia College graduate who set up his film company, Beverly Ridge Pictures, in the city, said the value of Chicago's film infrastructure overcomes bigger tax credits from neighboring states.

Columbia College recently opened a media production center with motion capture stages and sound stages that can accommodate a big production. DePaul has an excellent program that focuses on computing and digital media, adding to the local talent pool.

And a plethora of talented stage actors call Chicago home. In other words, you have a place that provides everything a filmmaker might need. Almost.

Chicago doesn't yet have sophisticated post-production facilities that compete with Los Angeles and New York. Chathappuram said he chose to do post-production for "Ca\$h" in Southern California.

But even that may be changing.

"I've seen a big increase in the amount of post-production facilities, increasing their technology at a competitive rate," Boshier said.

An average feature film might spend \$25 million in Chicago. A television series can spend \$50 million a year and provides long-term jobs for grips and camera operators, makeup artists, catering crew and local actors.

That's what this tax credit means: more jobs for Illinois and the potential to establish Chicago as a hub for independent filmmaking. What's not to like?