

Government

“Hollywood East” project inspires

Marlborough

Town promotes itself as filming location

by Jan Tormay

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Jane Boston can easily envision a drama, comedy, or thriller being filmed in Marlborough. With quaint, historic buildings and locations, which include the Marlborough Tavern, Sadler’s Ordinary restaurant, the Marlborough Barn compound among them, she believes the town has much to offer.

“There are so many opportunities for taking pictures of sailing, kayaking, swimming (at Lake Terramuggus) ... and the aerial views of the Marlborough Congregational Church are absolutely breathtaking.”

There are plenty of movies that feature city dwellers who travel to the country for a relaxing weekend, Ms. Boston said.

So, the Marlborough Economic Development Commission member’s logic is simple. “Films with shots such as these have been taken elsewhere in Connecticut. Why not come here?”

The idea of the interior or exterior of Sadler’s Ordinary being filmed as a scene in a national movie is exciting to owner Kevin Haggerty.

“I think the backdrop would be wonderful for any kind of New England theme or anything to do with something happening in the country.”

This cozy restaurant offers an inviting environment with its crackling fireplaces and traditional and eclectic furniture. “There is a time warp here,” Mr. Haggerty said. “People who have been coming here for 40 years feel like they’re coming to the same place. You can’t find that everywhere you go.”

In 2007, 24 movies and television programs were filmed partially or completely in the Nutmeg State. They include Steven Spielberg’s “Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of Crystal Skull” starring Harrison Ford, Barry Levinson’s “What Just

Happened?” with Robert De Niro, Bruce Willis and Sean Penn, Daryl Goldberg’s “Made for Each Other” and Gorman Bechard’s “Friends with Benefits.” TV programs such as NBC’s “Clash of the Choirs” and ABC’s “Fat March” and “Extreme Makeover Home Edition” were done here.

The popularity of filming productions in Connecticut has increased dramatically since mid-2006, when state legislators approved an ongoing 30 percent tax credit for goods, services and labor. There’s also no annual cap on the film tax credit program in Connecticut, nicknamed “Hollywood East” by state Rep. James Amann, D-Milford.

To attain the tax credit, companies must fill out an application, send it to the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, be pre-approved and submit all their receipts to recoup money spent. They must also spend more than \$50,000 in the state for pre-production, production, or post-production expenses – a small amount considering most movies cost millions to produce.

Win-win-win

The effect from local filming could be threefold, Ms. Boston said. During filming, cast and crew spend money locally on flowers, food and lodging in Marlborough and surrounding towns.

“There’s also the Mystic Pizza effect. People are still going to Mystic Pizza in Mystic where that famous movie was filmed like 20 years ago with Julia Roberts.”

Finally, the state is hoping to attract the infrastructure, “not to just have a movie come in for a month or two, then leave.”

Marlborough Planning and Development Director Peter Hughes said, “If that happens, we have a business park with land and people need to build things. There’s a lot of spin-off in this – sound, film editing, stage building ... If you can get these other trades in here, then you are going to create (well-paying) jobs that are going to stay.”

Ms. Boston said many production companies are coming back repeatedly to Connecticut, because they’ve had positive experiences.

So far, a major New York animation studio, Blue Sky Studios, has moved from White Plains, N.Y., to Greenwich because of the tax incentives.

Spurred by the 30 percent state tax incentive, investors purchased the 1.7 million-square-foot Point Stratford facility on 78 acres in mid-April for the highest bid of \$9,612,000 to transform it into a movie production company. The former Stratford army engine plant next to Sikorsky Memorial Airport was closed 12 years ago.

Making connections

To stay abreast of upcoming movies and actors, Ms. Boston goes to the Internet movie database. If there's a movie she believes is right for Marlborough, she sends a letter and photographs of the town to the movie producer, even though a location was probably chosen 12 months earlier.

“You just never know if there's a screen change ... You at least let them know that you're interested and available. Strike while the iron is hot.”

By letting them know about Marlborough, she's also hoping they'll keep the town in mind for future movies. She has already received several letters back saying as much.

Since taking on the responsibility of contacting the film industry for the economic development commission, Ms. Boston has heard from an independent filmmaker who was interested in Lake Terramuggus. “She thought the pictures of the lake are absolutely beautiful, but the distance was far.”

Ms. Boston was also contacted by a location scout for Oscar-winning director Sam Mendes' untitled movie project with John Krasinski and Cheryl Hines. Unfortunately, she was looking to replicate wide Colorado scenes of foothills with distant mountains that Marlborough does not have.

Then there was the response from Mr. Mendes' “Revolutionary Road” production company featuring his wife, Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio that stated their inquiry was too late.

To gain more visibility and become a serious contender, Ms. Boston said she and Marlborough Economic Development Commission Chairman Greg Servodidio met late last year with First Selectman Bill Black, the Connecticut Commission on

Culture & Tourism, state Sen. Mary Ann Handley, D-Manchester, whose district includes Marlborough and state Sen. Gary LeBeau, D-East Hartford.

It was then that Ms. Boston realized just how stiff the competition is: Marlborough is vying for film locations with other towns and cities in Connecticut and other states across the country.

Still, she said California is the number one filmmaking market and New York is second. So, actors and people who know the various phases of filmmaking are close by. Fairfield County has gotten the lion's share of film-related work. Other movie locations have included New London, Norwich, Litchfield, Bridgeport and New Haven. She also realizes that for some production companies, Marlborough is too far to travel. However, the fact that Marlborough is not in a remote location, is near airports and reachable by highway, is important, she said.

To assist the movie industry at a moment's notice, Ms. Boston said the state culture and tourism commission maintains a production guide of screenwriters, movie directors, actresses, photographers, lighting directors, producers and production assistants.

To build up a qualified workforce, the state commission is also planning to train people already involved in behind-the-camera work how to attain official union status. In the future, it also plans to offer guidance to high school and vocational students, as well as others interested in getting involved with the film industry.

Then, when New York or big productions come calling, Ms. Boston said, "We can say, 'You don't have to attract all your New York workers over here and move them here. We have them here already.'"

The local economic development commission's goal is to create greater visibility for Marlborough and bring more people and businesses to town for the business park, which will in turn, make the planned town center affordable for residents.

In addition to a 500-postcard campaign featuring four Marlborough pictures that cost \$500, Ms. Boston has also sent about 300 e-mails to location scouts in New York and California informing them of an electronic link to Marlborough's picturesque community.

"I just continually send them out. Next on my list are all the universities that have film schools. Then, I have all the Connecticut and New York advertising agencies."

Even though she is mainly responsible for promoting Marlborough as a great filming location, she said the other seven commission members are sometimes involved. For example, they voted when she needed help whittling 20 pictures down to four for the postcard. Commission members also voted not to contact producers of “slasher or National Lampoon movies, which would bring a negative connotation to the town.”

How it all began

Marlborough first got involved with promoting itself as a movie location after Mr. Servodidio attended a Catch a Rising Star breakfast in Hartford about two years ago. During the MetroHartford Alliance event, keynote speaker Chris Lemmon, an actor, writer and producer from Glastonbury, said the state’s new 30 percent tax credit is a wonderful way to attract film production companies and moviemaking in Connecticut. Marlborough officials realized they could promote the town to Hollywood producers by creating a local page with Marlborough pictures on the Connecticut Culture & Tourism website. Ms. Boston offered to help. “I called businesses in town and they were very excited to participate ... We’ve been working with Bill Black. Gil Thompson has taken a lot of photos of Marlborough for the town web site and the economic development commission web site.”

Other photographers have also provided photos of Lake Terramuggus, Blackledge River, cemeteries and the Salmon River Airfield, a private fly-in community on Ogden Lord Road.

Ms. Boston encouraged residents to have fun with the idea of being a future filming location, reminding them that actors come in all shapes and sizes. She suggested those interested in being in front of the camera, might consider signing up for acting classes and having glossy 8-by-10 close-up head shots taken to send to general casting agencies.

Speaking almost non-stop without pausing for breath, Ms. Boston’s enthusiasm is contagious. “So when a movie comes even close to Marlborough, why not line up and send a shot it, you never know when you’ll get your lucky break?”

And she would love to be an extra in a movie. “I think everybody should.”

Faced with her optimism and perseverance, it seems likely that a movie producer may indeed come to Marlborough one day.

“If I need to, I’ll write my own screenplay and have Marlborough featured in it,” she said smiling. **HML**

For more information, about the economic development commission go online to www.marlboroughctedc.net. To learn about upcoming events and the film industry, go online to www.cultureandtourism.org. Click on Films and then Crew & Casting Calls, which also includes Jobs and Reality TV Themes tabs.

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