

Lights, Camera, Action

By Reg P. Wydeven

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In junior high, my buddies and I went to 'Back to School,' the comedy starring Rodney Dangerfield. In the 1986 movie, Dangerfield plays Thornton Melon, the millionaire owner of a chain of tall and fat clothing stores, who attends Grand Lakes University with his son, Jason. The movie is a classic, not only because of Melon's Triple Lindy dive that wins the school's championship swim meet, but also because it was filmed in Madison. It was fun to look for buildings we recognized on the UW campus.

Three years later, 'Major League' was released. One of the greatest sports movies ever, the movie starred Tom Berenger, Charlie Sheen, Wesley Snipes and Corbin Bernsen as players on the overachieving Cleveland Indians. It also starred Milwaukee Brewers' announcer, Bob Uecker, as Harry Doyle, the voice of the Indians. Ueck felt right at home, as the movie was filmed in Milwaukee's County Stadium.

In 2008, Johnny Depp came to Oshkosh to film the movie 'Public Enemies,' where he starred as 1930s gangster John Dillinger. Parts of the movie were also filmed in Columbus and Darling. Like 'Back to School,' it was fun to watch and look for familiar buildings.

Most people think of Hollywood when associating a locale with moviemaking. However, in addition to these movies, dozens of flicks have been filmed in Wisconsin, including 'The Deep End of the Ocean,' 'Rudy,' 'Uncle Buck' and 'The Blues Brothers.'

Like Wisconsin, many states are welcoming movie production companies to film on their soil. For example, last year's mega-hit 'The Blind Side' starring Sandra Bullock was filmed in Atlanta, Georgia, even though the story took place in Memphis, Tennessee. On top of adding to the authenticity of a movie by filming on location, another reason for the exodus from Hollywood is simple: money.

In 2002, five states offered what are known as movie production incentives, or MPIs, including tax credits, cash rebates, and sales tax and lodging exemptions. Today, forty-four states now offer MPIs. Producers of 'The Blind Side' chose Georgia because it boasts a 20 percent tax credit, one of the highest in the U.S. They'll also throw in an additional 10 percent if a Georgia logo appears anywhere in the movie.

In 2002, Louisiana was one of the first states to implement MPIs. As a result, it landed such films as "Ray" and "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button." Last year, Louisiana increased its tax credit to 30 percent, and the 2011 blockbuster 'Green Lantern' starring Ryan Reynolds is being filmed there.

In a poor economy, states offer MPIs to hopefully attract movie productions, which result in a tremendous influx of money to the film's locale. Producers spend big bucks on hotels, rental cars, restaurants, equipment rentals, local crews, props, wardrobes and local extras. To qualify for the MPIs, filmmakers must meet the state's minimum standards for expenditures and they utilize local crews, some of whom don't belong to unions. However, bigger production companies typically prefer to work with union workers.

During the fiscal year of 2008-2009, movie studios, production companies and independent producers invested more than \$521 million in Georgia, which the state estimates the economic impact as being \$929 million. Louisiana estimates that its MPIs have generated thousands of jobs and more than \$2 billion since the program began in 2002.

I'm going to make a pitch that Kimberly should offer incentives to lure the producers of the Star Trek sequel to town.

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