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BREAKOUT KINGS (season 2) Fox's television series is shooting until Feb. 13 in Baton Rouge.

## Film production industry flourishing in Louisiana

By Howard Arceneaux

During the 1990s, runaway production costs took a major toll on the film production industry. Producers, directors and their studio bosses did their best to find ways to cut costs, or increase profits in an industry that measures success in millions of dollars. They began to look outside of the traditional production states of California and New York.

In 2002, Louisiana's state legislature introduced a competitive incentive package that centered around tax credits and rebates to lure productions. By 2010, 45 other U.S. states had followed suit with similar packages to Louisiana. In December, P3 Update, an entertainment industry publication, ran its list of Top 10 states for production, based on the most attractive combination of tax incentives, crew base, talent pool, infrastructure, accessibility, significant production revenue and overall popularity among filmmakers.

At the top of that list was Louisiana, followed by Illinois, Florida, Georgia and California. Connecticut is sixth, followed by New York, Utah, New Mexico and Michigan.

Filmmakers are heading to Louisiana where the production business is booming and the industry is maturing. Louisiana offers film productions a 30-percent transferable credit on total in-state expenditures, with no cap and only a minimum requirement of \$300,000. In addition, Louisiana offers a 5-percent labor tax credit for employed state residents.

The productions have included big-budget features like *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn*, *Battleship*, *Green Lantern*, *Battle: Los Angeles*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and smaller, independent films like *Swamp Shark*.

At any given moment, the crews are shooting feature films such as *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* and *21 Jump Street*, and also top TV series, like HBO's "Treme" and season two of "Memphis Beat."

Chris Stelly, Executive Director of Film & Television for the Office of Entertainment Industry Development within Louisiana Economic Development said past success has laid a solid foundation for future development.

"We've got a good reputation in the industry," said Stelly, who joined the office in 2004. "Within the industry, mainly through word-of-mouth, the major companies know what we have to offer and they know the incentive program. We've been able to grow that reputation by making the (incentives) system clear and easy as possible to maneuver through. We also make calls to people we haven't seen in our market, trying to introduce them to what we have to offer."

In addition to legendary hospitality, Louisiana's success is largely due to the state's ability to attract repeat business with its attractive incentives, deep crew base and abundance of studio facilities.

According to an economic impact and fiscal assessment report of the State's entertainment incentives between 2008 and 2010 by BaxStarr Consulting Group, Louisiana continues to enjoy significant growth each year.

In 2008 and 2009, the entertainment industry generated an average of \$710 million per year. That increased to approximately \$1.08 billion for 2010 alone, representing a 52 percent increase above the previous two years.

In addition, there are a number of multipliers in play for each of the entertainment industry sub-categories. According to the BSCG report, film production generates a multiple of \$5.71 in total economic impact for every \$1 of tax credits issued. For sound recording, the multiple is \$6.47 for every \$1 of tax credits, for digital media, \$6.90 to \$1 and for live performances, \$7.41 to \$1.

"Forty-plus other states are doing what we do or have copied what we do," said Stelly. "We've developed a skilled crew base, and deep infrastructure. We can provide a variety of looks: desert, swamps, plantations, suburban looks, big city looks. We have a variety of climates."

"At the end of the day, the incentives are not the total piece of the puzzle. It's a combination of everything. We've been doing this the longest and we have the model for other states."

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