

Chicago reaps record film revenue in 2013

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Chicago turned into Hollywood-by-the-Lake last year, helping fuel record revenue by the state's film industry.

"We blew away all past performance," said Dave Roeder, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Shooting in and around the city last year were a record six television series as well as three sci-fi films due for 2014 release — "Transformers 4: Age of Extinction" with Mark Wahlberg; "Divergent" with Kate Winslet and "Jupiter Ascending" directed by Andy and Lana Wachowski.

Combined with about 150 commercials, the state's film industry revenue soared to an estimated \$358 million in 2013, state officials said. That's nearly double the 2012 record of \$184 million. And 4,200 Illinois jobs, pulling down wages valued at \$203 million, emerged from the state's film work.

A big boon to the state's industry has been the expansion of Cinespace Chicago Film Studios, at 2621 W. 15th Place, in North Lawndale, state officials said.

Opened in 2011, the 50-acre site doubled its number of stages — to a current 18 — between 2012 and 2013, said Cinespace CFO Mark Degnen. Two to four more stages will be added to the 1.5-million-square-foot complex this year, Degnen said.

"We had an amazing, amazing year," said Betsy Steinberg, managing director of the Illinois Film Office. "We've always been a popular TV location but with the expansion of Cinespace we've had the physical capacity to host multiple shows at the same time.

"When you take the stage capacity and combine it with the tax credit, it really works well for television shows."

Series shooting in Chicago last year were "Chicago Fire," "Chicago P.D." and "Betrayal." Upcoming shows include "Crisis," "Mind Games" and "Sirens." Betrayal shot at Chicago Studio City, a smaller complex at 5660 W. Taylor featuring 12,000 square feet of studio space.

Gov. Quinn is scheduled to visit the "Chicago Fire" set at Cinespace Tuesday as a backdrop to tout Illinois' record year of film revenue. "Chicago Fire" alone spent \$58 million in Illinois in 2013, including \$30 million in wages, state officials said.

A film or television show brings a host of work with it, Steinberg said. That includes jobs for carpenters, welders, painters, electricians to build and light sets, as well as art directors and designers; hair stylists and makeup artists, caterers, office workers, janitors and security guards.

“When people come to a set they are surprised to see how many bodies are working,” Steinberg said.

Goods and services purchased in Illinois for a film or television production are eligible for a 30 percent tax credit. Quinn extended that credit for 10 years in 2011 and contends the incentive has brought \$1.3 billion to the state since its inception.