

Dallas Business Journal

TV industry looking to Dallas sites
Dallas Business Journal - by Bill Hethcock

Ever since the heyday of oil tycoon J.R. Ewing in the 1980s, television has shaped the way Dallas is viewed by the rest of the world — for better or for worse. Now, the city that served as the filming site for the TV show that bore its name is seeing a resurgence of television filming as Hollywood producers and directors increasingly turn to North Texas as the backdrop for their episodes.

Janis Burklund, director of the Dallas Film Commission, hopes the new batch of TV shows will, in part, lay J.R.'s memory to rest.

“We are well-known for a little show called “Dallas” with J.R. Ewing, and even after all these years, when you mention the city, it’s one of the first things that pops into people’s heads,” Burklund said. “We definitely want to get some new shows so we can show the new reality. With television, it may be a false reality, but at least it will be an updated reality.”

Big D’s lure

Spurred by aggressive state incentives and a production-friendly attitude, Dallas pulled in \$35.6 million in television spending in the year that ended May 1 — 40 percent of the \$89.8 million total statewide spent shooting TV episodes, according to the Texas Film Commission.

Only Austin, the site of filming for high school football drama “Friday Night Lights,” had more TV spending, with \$51 million in the year ending May 1. Television spending during the period totaled about \$962,000 in Houston; \$223,000 in San Antonio; and \$2 million in all other areas of the state.

New projects in Dallas include the Fox police show “The Good Guys” and pilot “Midland” as well as Warner Bros. Studios’ “The Chase,” a police drama shot for NBC.

“The Good Guys” stars Bradley Whitford and Colin Hanks (Tom’s son) as partners assigned to petty crimes. “Midland,” set in the cities of Midland and Houston but shot in Dallas, stars Jimmy Wolk as — and this might sound familiar — an oil man living a double life in the two cities.

Jon Voight also plays a lead role in the drama. “The Chase,” by Jerry Bruckheimer of “CSI” fame, is about federal marshals tracking down fugitives.

The Dallas area, a longtime hub for the filming of commercials, has the film crews, the production equipment and the variety of locations that producers, directors and location scouts seek, said Bob Hudgins, director of the Texas Film Commission.

The area’s central U.S. location and two airports make North Texas highly accessible, he added.

“One thing that Dallas brings to the game is diversity of locations,” Hudgins said. “You get Fort Worth, you get Waxahachie, you get Denton. The list goes on and on.”

Bob Lemchen, senior vice president of production at Fox Television Studios, said that was a big reason Fox chose Dallas for “The Good Guys.” The drama/comedy is currently filming scenes for its seventh episode at The **Azure** condo tower in Uptown, and recently shot scenes at Thanksgiving Tower in downtown Dallas and at Fair Park.

“Dallas has an upscale urban downtown, affluent suburbs, and middle- and working-class areas as well as rural environments,” Lemchen said. “That makes it a great place to shoot.”

A welcoming metro

“Midland” producer J.B. Moranville, who recently shot scenes at the **Saint Ann Court** office tower in Dallas, said in addition to strong incentives to lure film and TV production to Texas, and the ability to find crews, Dallas’ generally positive outlook toward the film industry attracted his project to the city.

Dallas building and property owners and operators typically welcome film crews more than they do in Los Angeles, he said.

“Here in Los Angeles, after so many years of filming, people are jaded,” Moranville said. “They try to gouge us and ask for outrageous sums of money. As a producer, I have a budget I have to live within.”

20th Century Fox paid \$10,000 to shoot “Midland” for three days at **Saint Ann Court** in the **Harwood** district of Uptown. **Harwood International** charged \$7,000 for two scenes filmed at the penthouse level and \$3,000 for a cocktail scene filmed in space that’s normally occupied by Boston Consulting Group.

Moranville said he chose the building because he liked its height, sleek design and views of the city.

Jihane Boury, vice president of development and leasing for **Harwood International**, said the filming will mean valuable exposure for the striking, 26-story office tower.

“It really showcases our building and our amenities to prospective clients,” she said. “We’re proud we were chosen.”

Boury played a bit part in the production as a high-powered oil executive sipping champagne (which was actually apple juice and Alka-Seltzer, she confides).

Moranville, whose producing and directing credits date back to “Dynasty,” “Love Boat,” “MacGyver” and “Pacific Blue,” has shot at locations across the United States and Canada.

For the one-hour pilot of “Midland,” Moranville flew in eight of the show’s stars from Los Angeles, hired about a dozen local actors plus 450 man-days worth of extras, as well as a local camera crew, grips and props people, he said.

If the show is picked up by Fox, he’ll return to Dallas for more filming later this year.

“I think we have a lot going for us,” he said. “I’m looking forward to coming back.”