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Behind the cameras at Celtic Media Centre

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Not every job at Celtic Media Centre exudes glamour.

Take the pump truck supplied by Baton Rouge-based Hollywood Trucks LLC, which collects sewage from trailers and multi-stall honeywagons on regular rounds through the studio lot.

Yet it's one of many jobs generating business across a spectrum of industries.

Hollywood Trucks, just two years old, began as a vision of industry insiders Andre Champagne and Doug Dovichi, with a big assist from Baton Rouge auto and truck dealer Mike Hollingsworth.

The business has grown its truck inventory from two to 200 in two years.

“We’re swamped,” said Jarred Coates, who manages the firm’s Baton Rouge headquarters at Celtic. Hollywood Trucks also operates in New Orleans and Shreveport.

From Teamsters-driven tractor-trailers to Ford 450 Super-Duty pickups and small four-wheel, all-terrain buggies, Hollywood Trucks met a movie industry demand for quick access to a flexible fleet of vehicles.

“It was just seeing a need,” Coates said. More than 75 vehicles were dispatched for filming by “Battle: Los Angeles” in Baton Rouge while still more trucks supported other productions in Shreveport and New Orleans.

Because such fleets are here now and are tailored for the film business, producers don’t have to spend more

to ship trucks from out-of-state and incur greater fuel and driver costs, Coates said.

And the expenses can be considerable.

“You’re really looking at a transportation department being about 10 percent of a (movie’s) budget,” Coates said.

Cost-savings are principally what drove the industry to Louisiana in a bigger way, with film production tax credits reaching the 30 percent level this year, with no expiration date. Another 5 percent credit is available to filmmakers on wages paid Louisiana residents.

Paying wages in the film business can be a taxing exercise in itself.

Cast and Crew Entertainment Services LLC, a 33-year-old business based in Burbank, Calif., opened an office at the Celtic Media Centre two years ago to help filmmakers navigate payroll issues.

Because multiple unions work in the film business and benefits can vary, depending on the crew members’ home states, Cast and Crew can deal with more than 30 different union payroll scenarios on a single production, said Joie Hauschild, who manages the company’s Baton Rouge office and film payrolls statewide.

“You have to make sure that everybody is in compliance with their agreements,” said Hauschild, a native of Grand Rapids, Mich., who formerly worked for a film production company in California.

Cast and Crew exchanges payroll data with film production companies in remote locations through a proprietary software system. The convenience becomes more valuable when productions shift into unexpected workloads.

“They want to make sure they’re not blown away when they go into overtime,” Hauschild said. “They have to know the actual hard costs of what everything is going to be, including taxes.”

Celtic officials hope one day to have major filmmakers open permanent offices at their studio. In the meantime, filmmakers already reside at Celtic.

Launch Media, which merged owner John Jackson’s GreenScreenTV and Panoramic Productions companies this year, operates a 2,000-square-foot studio space that specializes in TV, commercial video and green screen applications — those that place lifelike backdrops behind actors. Launch Media also has a 2,000-square-foot office in the Oak Tree Building on the corner of Celtic’s lot.

Jackson said the company has developed treatments for a TV series it's shopping in California. Meanwhile, its bread-and-butter commercial and industrial video work continues in Baton Rouge and elsewhere.

In Texas, Launch is setting up a broadcast set inside a large refinery that's under construction, part of a two-year project in which the company will help its customer keep thousands of employees apprised of the construction progress.

The company has four full-time employees at Celtic, two contract employees in Texas, and Jackson envisions operating four divisions focused on broadcast commercials; TV production; corporate marketing and industrial videos; and new media.

"We've got people in place that can help take on that work, and I've got people I would love to hire if we get to the point I can bring them on board," said Jackson, who also works with another Celtic tenant, Films in Motion, on projects.

"If there's something outside the scope of our normal employees, we're able to take advantage of the skills of an animator or an editor across the hall," he said. "That enables you to expand the scope of your projects."

Films in Motion LLC owner Jason Hewitt handled production services on eight feature films in 2008 and recently completed "Wrong Side of Town" for Lion's Gate Entertainment Corp., the first in a four-picture deal. He's also filming "The Mortician," a 3-D project, in New Orleans.

Hewitt has six full-time employees at Celtic but staff rises by 80 to 100 people during film production. Celtic is the premier movie studio in the state, he said, but it likely will be booked with business soon, creating additional demand in other parts of the state.

"I do see post-production as the next big movement," Hewitt said, "specifically unsupervised post (production), such as sound and visual effects that do not require the director's or producer's constant supervision."

There are multiple businesses capable of providing quality post-production services in Baton Rouge and the state, said Patrick Mulhearn, the director of studio operations at Celtic.

"But post (production) is a tough nut to crack, because so much of it is done in L.A.," he said. "And so many of them, after it's over, want to go back to their families."

Some of that trend is reversing. Haryl Deason manages Hollywood Rentals fleet of lighting and grip equipment at Celtic with five employees.

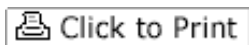
A Detroit native, Deason worked for Hollywood Rentals more than two decades in Los Angeles. For a large production such as “Battle: Los Angeles,” Deason’s banks of lighting — from 100-watt bulbs to 18,000-watt lights — are arrayed on sets with union crews of grip and lighting specialists — about 80 people for “Battle: Los Angeles.”

Coming to live and work in Baton Rouge represented, for Deason, what the movie business has meant for many.

“This was an opportunity to come out here and start something up,” he said.

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