



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
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More Movie Productions for WNY

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A California movie crew brought the bright lights of Hollywood to East Aurora recently, realizing what residents here already know; despite the snow and the cold, Western New York is a warm and friendly place.

Mascot Pictures needed a snowy, picturesque village to film a movie called “Small Town Prince,” a family-friendly Christmas romance about a European prince who comes to the United States to avoid an arranged marriage. He gets stranded and falls in love with a local girl. Once director Fred Olen Ray set his eyes on East Aurora and the surrounding area, he didn’t have to look any further. The community provided everything he needed, from the quaint Main Street business district and Victorian-style homes, to the rolling countryside. The frigid temperatures and abundance of natural snow were a bonus.

But what Ray and his crew didn't count on is the hospitality of Western New Yorkers, who rolled out the red carpet for the actors and crew that set up shop in East Aurora for the better part of three weeks. Since this is a Christmas movie, producers asked if a few holiday decorations could be hung along Main Street in order to set the mood. Not only did village officials agree, but dozens of businesses and homeowners dug out decorations they recently packed away to help make the town look festive.

The Greater East Aurora Chamber of Commerce worked with the Buffalo-Niagara Film Commission to coordinate the effort and to spread the word about the needs of the film crew and opportunities for movie "extras." The producers experienced the same cooperation when they traveled to Arcade and Akron to film other scenes for the movie.

But playing host to a film crew is about more than the pride we feel by having our community so prominently featured in a major motion picture. The production team spent several hundred thousand dollars during its time here on everything from meals and lodging, to supply purchases and equipment rentals. It also hired about 20 local people to help with lighting, make-up and other tasks.

It's this economic spinoff that prompted me to draft legislation to enhance benefits for Buffalo and other parts of upstate in New York's Film Tax Credit Program. The state has offered the incentive for years, but up until 2013 it primarily benefitted the New York City region. Leveling the playing field for areas like Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Rochester has brought dozens of projects to our neck of the woods, along with the economic benefits.

"Small Town Prince" is not the first movie to be filmed in Western New York and it certainly won't be the last. In fact, director Fred Olen Ray says he wants to come back soon to make another movie here, taking advantage of both the region's natural and man-made beauty. He just wants to wait until it warms up.

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