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The Times-Picayune

Get a grip in film class **Movie industry training to start**

Thursday, August 04, 2005

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A day after Gov. Kathleen Blanco announced plans for a \$20 million movie studio in Algiers, Mayor Ray Nagin said his office is launching a worker training program that, along with the studio, officials hope, will make the state and city more attractive to movie producers.

"We are capitalizing on the booming business by laying the groundwork for a permanent infrastructure and a trained workforce," Nagin said in a statement Wednesday.

The Regional Film Workforce Training program will begin later this month and initially will offer two four-week classes for 30 students focusing on the jobs of grip and electrician. Those jobs pay at least \$20 an hour within the film industry, said Ernest Collins, executive director of arts and entertainment in the New Orleans Mayor's Office of Economic Development.

The classes, taught at Louisiana Technical College, will be paid for through the city's Job 1 program. The courses will be taught by industry professionals, and students who complete it will receive a certificate. Collins said the city will be working with film crews to secure jobs for the students.

Additional classes -- including makeup, set design and wardrobe -- will be forthcoming and dictated by the industry's needs. Those will be paid for with a state grant.

Worker training programs were considered one of the elements lacking since Louisiana's film industry took off a few years ago.

New Orleans, along with other cities in the state, has benefited from a state tax incentive program that dramatically increased the number of film productions in the state. The program offers investors a 15 percent tax credit on the cost of productions valued at \$8 million or more. Revenue generated by the industry in the state has grown from \$3.9 million in 2002 to an expected \$377 million in 2005, Blanco said Tuesday.

City Economic Development Director Don Hutchinson said the incentives, training programs and infrastructure are key to keeping the industry here.

Also on Wednesday, Nagin reintroduced the Mayor's National Film Advisory Board, formerly the Hollywood South Board, which will promote the local film industry. Among other things, the board will meet with major studio heads and work with universities to develop training programs. The board is being co-chaired by New Orleans native Harold Sylvester, an actor who has appeared in several movies including "An Officer and a Gentleman" and the television show "Married with Children."

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