



A turnkey production facility and virtual set campus, Cobalt Stages brings Hollywood to the Hudson.

## Soundstages Spring Up to Meet State's Filming Surge

New Jersey extends tax credit for brick-and-mortar development in push to position state as a regional production hub.

BY ADDIE MORFOOT

New Jersey's diverse landscapes, film-friendly communities and favorable tax incentives have brought it to the forefront of shooting locations on the East Coast.

Not content to settle for location shoots alone, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy has been urging developers to build state-of-the-art soundstages and production facilities and is creating financial incentives for them to do so.

As a result, new stages have come online and more are on the way.

Gov. Murphy explains, "Our goal in growing the film and TV industry's presence in New Jersey is not just to increase the number of productions shot here, but also to attract studios that will make our state a broad-based hub to create feature projects, along with the ancillary businesses that support them."

With demand for those facilities surging, developers are responding with new construction. Several high-quality soundstages have opened in the Garden State, and even more are in development.

On the back of a hot lease market, the governor sent a letter to major movie and television studios last April 2021, offering a 40% credit to those willing to open production facilities in Jersey. The credit, part of the state's overhaul of its tax incentive programs, is a major piece of the governor's film-related agenda.

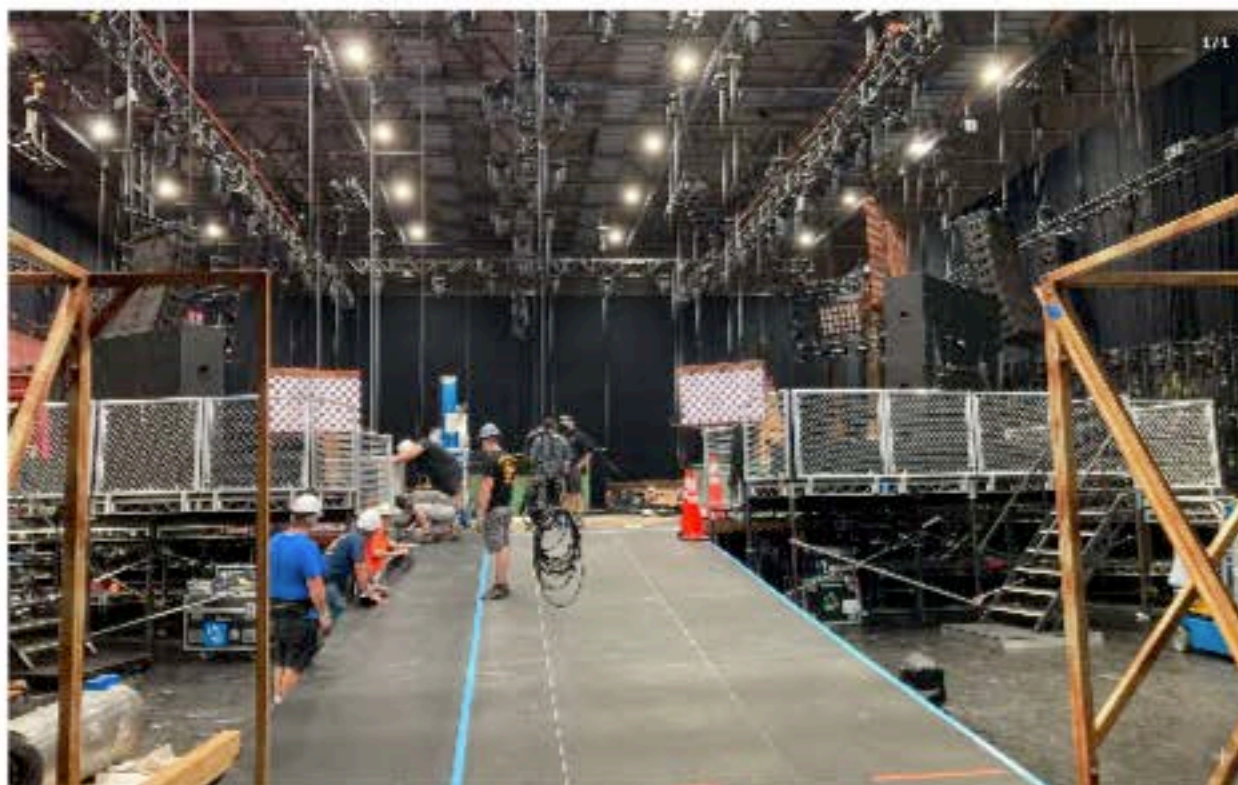
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"The narrative has changed," explains Palisade Stages president Jamie Payne. "People in the business used to think when a production was happening in the tri-state area it had to be Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens or Staten Island."

Payne's Palisade Stages, which opened its doors in New Jersey in January 2021, is located in Kearny Point, just eight miles from the Holland Tunnel. The 23,000-square-foot retrofitted warehouse features 32-foot-high ceilings, an industry standard lighting grid, sound-mitigated walls, office space, greenrooms, loading bays and plenty of parking.

Eleven miles away, in Jersey City, is Cinelease Studios — Caven Point, home to three columnless soundstages totaling 112,400 square feet. They are 40 feet high to the grid and 50 feet to the ceiling. Cinelease is currently hosting the shoot for an upcoming cable series.

Cobalt Stages in Hoboken, billed as Hollywood on the Hudson, is a 12,000-square-foot production facility featuring a 7,000-square-foot turnkey soundstage, 20-foot ceilings, equipment rentals and what the facility claims is the East Coast's first virtual backlot. It became an important resource during pandemic restrictions as some shows pivoted to virtual production to shoot in a bubble.



Cinelease Studios, Caven Point — the only purpose-built media campus in NJ — is located within New York City's 30-mile zone, offering filmmakers numerous advantages.

The most recent soundstage to open is 10 Basin Studios at the Kearny Point Business Center. Associated with Eastern Effects Inc. — a Manhattan-based grip, lighting and studio rental company — 10 Basin Studios is the company's third campus in the tri-state area. The new facility offers 36,000 square feet of fully soundproof stage and support space and 10,000 square feet of office, flex space and premise parking.

Besides those facilities, warehouses surrounding 10 Basin Studios are currently being turned into soundstages, and both Palisade and Cinelease are planning to expand in 2022. In October 2021, it was reported that a 289-acre former Army base in New Jersey could be developed into one of the largest movie and television production hubs in the Northeast. More recently, plans were approved for a Bayonne developer to build a 19-building lot with stages, post

Bayonne developer to build a 19-building lot with stages, post facilities and offices.

North Jersey's stages and facilities are leased out steadily. Universal rented Palisade Stages to film Nicholas Stoller's "BROS." Billed as the first major studio film with an all LGBTQ+-identifying principal cast, the story centers on two men with commitment issues who try to form a relationship. Though the movie is set in New York, all primary production took place in Jersey.

"We really relied on Jersey for everything," says "BROS" executive producer Karl Frankenfield. "We shot in several locations, and our set dressing, storage and office facilities were at Palisade Stages whether or not we were shooting there."

Gannon Murphy, general manager of Cinelease Studios (no relation to the governor), says the company, which manages soundstages around the U.S., has always been strategically focused on developing brick and mortar infrastructure for production. In New Jersey, Cinelease Studios' owner and developer, Criterion Group, is already doubling down on its expansion efforts.

"We've been doing this successfully in Southern California, Georgia, New York and Texas for over 45 years. Because of the interest that Gov. Murphy put into it, the New Jersey tax incentive was certainly the beginning of the conversation for us," says Gannon Murphy.

Cinelease Studios, Palisade Stages and 10 Basin Studios are all located just minutes from midtown Manhattan, well within the union studio zone.

"States with the right mix of strong crew base, supported economic incentives and proximity to established production markets [tend to] succeed in building entertainment infrastructure and industry longevity," adds Gannon Murphy. "Which allows businesses like Cinelease to establish permanent, year-round physical locations that put money into the state's tax base and encourage others to follow." ✪

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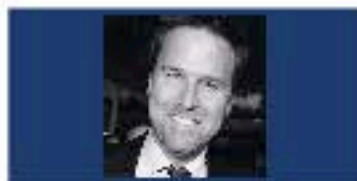
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