

A Hollywood Sequel for Michigan Workers

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AS the job market tightens, many people would welcome the chance to receive training for work in a new field — if only they could figure out which industries were hiring, and how to find and pay for that training.

A new program in Michigan, which has suffered staggering job losses related to the auto industry, seeks to solve this conundrum. The program is training people to work in the film industry, which is experiencing a huge growth spurt in response to the state's incentives to companies making films in Michigan. An example is [Clint Eastwood's](#) latest, "Gran Torino," filmed in the state. Last week, the governor's office announced that its efforts to attract film production companies to the state would yield nearly 6,000 new jobs.

The film training project is a partnership of Oakland Community College, located just outside Detroit, and S3 Entertainment Group, a film production company that worked on "Gran Torino." The classes are short and intense, lasting 20 to 40 hours over several weeks.

The program began last week with two courses — an industry overview and an introduction to technical jobs in the production, grip and electrical departments for films and television. Two more classes — one in production accounting, the other covering hair, makeup, wardrobe, scripts and props — will begin in March.

Julie Goode, 28, who enrolled in the first two classes, says she learned about the film training program in a fairly random way. After being laid off as an automobile upholstery designer for the [Lear Corporation](#), Ms. Goode started looking around for jobs related to textile design. "I checked out all the job search engines, Googled 'textile design' and other terms in my field, but I was kind of overwhelmed by the number of jobs that were out there and how many people were looking for them," she said.

As part of her networking, she also started a [Facebook](#) page and posted a note saying she was looking for a new job. Several friends wrote to her with advice, including one who happens to work for Oakland Community College. That friend suggested that she look into the film training program. Ms. Goode went to an open house at the offices of the S3 Entertainment Group, where she learned about financial aid being offered to laid-off workers under Michigan's "No Worker Left Behind" law.

Ms. Goode said the fees for her courses would be covered for the next couple of years. "It all just fell together after going to that seminar," she said.

Jeff Spilman, managing partner of S3 Entertainment, says the program has a three-pronged approach. The first is to give a basic understanding of how the film industry works and to introduce people to various job functions. The second involves placing people into internships, either on a feature film or in a film support industry, which his company will help arrange. The final piece is job placement.

"Basically, we'll be helping people get the industry experience they need to get jobs," he said. The courses are all taught by people who work in the film industry, in Michigan or

Hollywood. "In the end, you're not just learning, you are being taught by the very folks who will ultimately be able to hire you here in Michigan," he said. "So while it's training, it's really job creation."

Rochelle Kaye, a program manager at O.C.C. who worked with Mr. Spilman to create the program, explained it this way: "The film industry is very much a 'who you know' business, and we are creating the 'who they know.' "

The courses cost \$1,850 each, but between scholarships from the college and state financing for laid-off workers, about half the students in the first session of classes paid nothing for their training.

Mr. Spilman recognizes that these jobs are not for everyone. "It is a freelance lifestyle where you might work 12 hours a day every day for three months and then find yourself off for a month. So you need a lifestyle that allows you to do that, which eliminates a lot of people," he said. "There is also the health insurance issue. You don't have industry insurance until you have enough experience to join the union, so you have to budget for that."

He says he has spent a lot of time talking with applicants to make sure they understand these issues.

For Cathy DeNardo, 44, who has received a scholarship from Oakland Community College to take the first two classes, the freelance lifestyle was part of the program's appeal. Ms. DeNardo has worked as a toolmaker since she was 16. She has been self-employed since she was 19, first in her own tool shop and more recently in a business selling machinery to the automobile industry. In the last year her business has dried up, so she has been trying to figure out what else she can do.

SHE knew that more films were being made in Michigan, but she had no idea how to find work in that industry until she heard about the film training program on a radio show. That same night, she attended an open house at S3 Entertainment's studios.

"Being 44 and a female, I wasn't sure I'd fit in at all," she said, "But I figured I'd take my chances." At the open house, she learned about the opportunity for a scholarship, which made a big difference because she did not know if she would be able to afford the courses.

Ms. DeNardo said she probably got the scholarship because of her background with tools, and she hopes to do work involving special effects. "I didn't know that you could build anything else but cars," she said. "But I can work and run any machine as long as you show me where the handles are."

For Ms. DeNardo, the program came at just the right time. "It's so sad here," she said. "All the companies are going. This is really upbeat that the movie industry is coming because we really need something to get our spirits up. I have to step up and show them what I can do, but that's the next step."

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