

[art](#) | [dance](#) | [film](#) | [food](#) | [music](#) | [photography](#) | [theater](#) | [travel](#) | [writing](#)

Artsphoria

Film



Home

News

Blog

Features

Leaders

Profiles

Services

Advertisements

Contact

Premium Spotlights



Sigourney Weaver arrives at the 35th Cesar Film Award ceremony (Getty Images)

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Q & A: Executive Director of the Greater Philadelphia Film Office Sharon Pinkenso

By Andrea K. Hammer, director of Artsphoria

Following this week's Tribeca Incentives Symposium in New York City, Executive Director of the Greater Philadelphia Film Office (GPFO) Sharon Pinkenso discussed serving on the panel, working on exciting and challenging projects, and taking a forefront position in "going green" on sets.

Held on April 21, the symposium was titled "The State of the States" and focused on the legislative and budgetary challenges facing various film offices. In addition to Pinkenso, panelists included Nick Paleologos, executive director, Massachusetts Film Office; Jamie Cope, production director, West Virginia Film Office; Mike Hansen, 3 Point Capital, New York; Blair Robbins, CPA, Amper Politziner & Mattia; Pat Kaufman, N.Y. State Governor's Office for Motion Picture and Television Development; and Alan Bailey, former treasurer of Paramount Pictures.

Can you highlight some key points from the symposium? It was specifically a program—in the form of a panel discussion—that was about tax credits. So there were film commissioners, and it was moderated by the CEO of [Tax Credits LLC](#), which is a company that brokers tax credits across the country.

Is there anything new on that front in Pennsylvania? Our tax credits are on a fiscal year cycle. So we're coming to the end of the fiscal year. We're looking forward to the restoration of the \$75 million cap.

What made you look forward to getting back to GPFO after a day in New York? The thing that turns me on the most is when we're trying to attract a new project, and we're working hard at that.... I knew that today I was going to take Mayor Nutter to the set of *Dark Fields* and introduce him to the director and the star.

What are some challenges that you've faced recently, and how have you solved them? Yesterday we had a big crisis. The night before last, I got a call from the location manager on *Dark Fields*. Their big location at the end of the movie ... the property was being taken over by a bank out of state. They didn't care about the movie and weren't going to cooperate with the movie....

"That's my favorite thing to do is problem solving. When nobody else can figure it out, then I can figure it out and make something happen."

So what did you do in this case? I ran it up the flag pole and asked the mayor to give the banker a call, and he did. They're completing the negotiations now. I'm pretty confident that it's going to work out.

What other projects are working on now, and what do you find engaging about them? We work on very large and very small projects. So we simultaneously have this very large project, *Dark Fields*, and a very small project, which started on Monday [April 19] called *Changing the Game*. It's a locally based, independent small-budget film.

We like supporting well-known filmmakers and big projects with big stars—and also smaller ones. All of that makes us feel like we're accomplishing our mission.

What is distinctive about filming in Philadelphia? Philadelphia is actually very distinct from other locations. We just wrapped a television series pilot for NBC Universal, where we portrayed Washington, D.C. Right now, we're shooting a feature film, where we're portraying New York City. And in a small independent film, we're portraying Philadelphia.

So Philadelphia has tremendous character of its own. But it can also be a chameleon; it can look like so many other places. We doubled for Paris, for example, in *Transformers II*. So we can be lots of other places, and yet being in the middle of the East Coast corridor—right on the Amtrak line, if you will—it means that being close to New York, for the film industry, is an advantage....

Our historic locations can't be beat. The fabric of Philadelphia, the mix of old buildings—beautiful old buildings—and beautiful modern skyscrapers and skyline makes it a really unique city. And you can get from City Hall to rolling country hillsides in a matter of minutes.

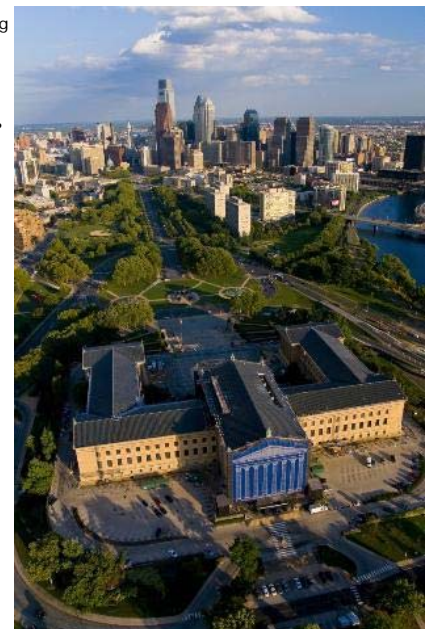
As I like to say, "You can get from the countryside of Philadelphia from Center City in less time than it takes you to get from the East Side to the West Side in New York." That's a big advantage.

Are you from Philly? Yes, I'm a lifelong Philadelphian and a huge supporter. My favorite thing to do is to talk about my city. And, you know, we represent five counties. We're not just Philadelphia; we're Greater Philadelphia.

What else would you like others to know about GPFO's work? We generally do three things. We market the region to the moving picture industry to get productions of many different sizes and types. At the same time that we're working on these feature films, people



Executive Director of GPFO Sharon Pinkenso (Photo courtesy of GPFO)



In the forefront, the Philadelphia Museum of Art rises majestically at the end of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Constructed of Minnesota Dolomite and completed in 1928, the museum covers 10 acres and houses more than 200,000 works spanning 2,000 years. In the back of the photo, the Comcast Center towers as the tallest building between New York and Chicago. (Photo by B. Krist for GPTMC)



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don't realize that we have many cable TV shows that we're working with and supporting. We're working to make sure that our legislators understand the importance of the film tax credits—without which we would not have production anymore; that's the way the industry works.

In addition, we actually handle the day-to-day filming activity for everything that's going on in the City of Philadelphia and frequently in the suburbs as well. You can't get any city services, for example, unless you get them through the Film Office. So we're very "hands on" with everything from parking to trash removal to getting hotel rooms and police services. All of that has to be coordinated through our office, so people don't realize that we're responsible for all of that activity.

Then, we have a program called Greater Philadelphia Filmmakers, which is the gem of the office. That is a program to support the local indigenous film community and people who just like film or want to be in the film industry. I think our website is extremely robust and has a tremendous amount of information that you can spend hours on it. The Filmmakers Program, if you go on the website, you can get a job as an extra or a crew member; you can find out about Philadelphia films and get more information.

We have seminars and are constantly running programs... We have one coming up about location managers. Sometimes they're about our multicultural program. We want to make sure that the filmmakers look like the population of Philadelphia. We strongly encourage multicultural production and crews. We work with the unions. We have programs and seminars that are both educational and inspirational. We'll have open screenings of films by local filmmakers. So there's always something going on that's exciting.

And you're going "green"? We're actually in the forefront of going green on sets. Filmmakers, when you start a project, are starting with nothing. You have a budget, you have to create a production office, hire people, get furniture, computers. Then, you would need to build sets and use lumber and hardware, paint, clothing, food, paper. There's so much that goes into the production; at the end, everything needs to be disposed of. So we've been taking a real leadership role in encouraging our filmmakers on good green practices on sets, and there's a whole section of our production guide that's devoted to it and on our website. We encourage green vendors to advertise with us. We encourage the filmmakers to use those vendors and practice green filmmaking.

Anything else you would like to discuss? This is our 25th anniversary year. The Film Office was established in 1985, so this is our big 25th year. We're just putting some plans together; we have an annual event in the fall and plan to expand it to a weekend of activities, probably in the middle of November. More about that later....

For updates, visit www.film.org.

Philadelphia is the nation's oldest continuously operating farmers market. Visitors enjoy virtually every type of cuisine, from soul food to Asian and Middle Eastern dishes to traditional Pennsylvania Dutch fare. (Photo by K. Ciappa for GPTMC)

The breathtaking scenery at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Chester County, rambles over 1,050 public acres of gardens, woodlands and meadows. (Photo by B. Krist for GPTMC)

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