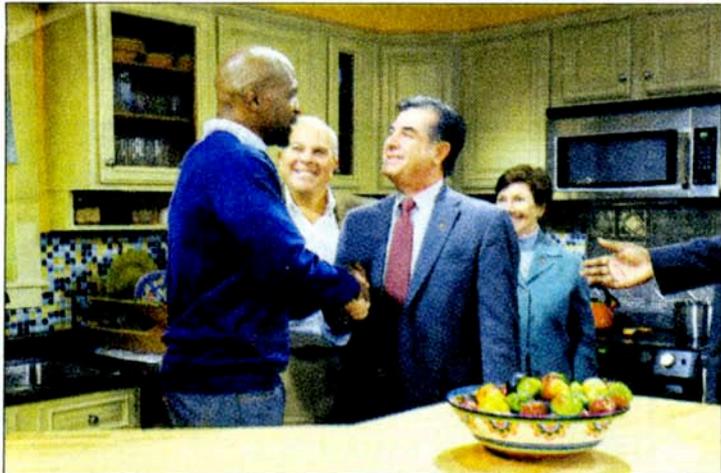


The ADVOCATE



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KATHLEEN O'ROURKE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Terry Crews, former NFL player and actor, tours the set of TBS's sitcom "Are We There Yet?" with Stamford Mayor Michael Pavia, Lt. Gov. Michael Fedele and State Representative Livvy Floren at the CT Film Center Stages in Stamford Friday.

CITY WHERE ACTORS WORK

New TBS sitcom filming in Stamford

By Kate King
Staff Writer

STAMFORD — The film studio felt like Hollywood, with production assistants murmuring into headsets and makeup artists scurrying after actors and actresses roaming the set.

But it's the Connecticut Film Center studio on Stillwater Avenue, not Los Angeles, that is serving as

the film location for "Are We There Yet?" a new TBS sitcom chronicles the daily life of a man who has just married a divorced mother of two.

The show is one of many director Ali LeRoi predicts will be lured to Connecticut by the state's film credit program and the large pool of acting talent found

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Sitcom finds home in Stamford

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nearby in New York City. Connecticut since 2006 has offered a 30-percent tax credit for film production expenses that exceed \$100,000.

"I really do believe we're making an economic statement, a creative statement," LeRoi said at a press conference Friday morning. "It's a new economy, it's a new world. We're all trying to stay relevant."

About a dozen Connecticut officials and politicians visited the "Are We There Yet?" set Friday morning to meet the production crew and cast members. The event offered a close look at what the state's film tax incentives have brought to Stamford.

"We're spending over \$60 million on this show over a 15-month timespan," said Vince Totino,

one of the show's executive producers. "So the amount of business we're bringing to local vendors and the local economy is just enormous."

The show is executive-produced by Ice Cube and stars Terry Crews, a former NFL player and actor on the sitcom "Everybody Hates Chris." Crews led Lt. Gov. Michael Fedele, Mayor Michael Pavia and several other state and local officials on a tour of the show's set Friday morning.

"I want to show you our living room," Crews said as he ushered the group onto the set. "Come right in. It gets real comfortable. After awhile you forget there isn't a wall there."

TBS will film 100 episodes of "Are We There Yet?" in Stamford, an unusually high number for a new sitcom, said Executive Producer Matt Alvarez.

"The standard order is 13 episodes, maybe if you're lucky you can get 16," he said. "So this is a really special model."

The show's producers reached an agreement with the cable channel that if the first 10 episodes achieved a certain rating, the station would order 90 more segments, Totino said. The show's trial run passed the test and the crew is now busy filming 80 more episodes at a rate of about three a week. New shows will air at 10 p.m. Wednesdays from January through September 2011, Totino said.

"They've got 80 more episodes to film here, they're going to be here a long time," Pavia said. "It just proves that Stamford is a great place to film."

Fedele praised the show's commitment to Stamford and the economic boon it promises the local community. Since filming will last for an extended period of time, many of the show's cast members and production crew have relocated to the area with their families.

"I really like Stamford," said Coy Stewart, 12, who moved to Stamford about a month ago and plays Crews' son on the show. "I love Kona Grill. I get the sweet-chili glazed salmon." Crews said he is stay-

ing in a hotel for the moment but that his wife is coming to Stamford this weekend to help him look at houses.

"We're going to be here for awhile," Crews said. "I have five children and a grandbaby. I'm really looking forward to giving my family that East Coast vibe. They've never experienced autumn. They're like, 'Wow, trees are orange?'"

Essence Atkins, who plays Crews' wife on the show, said she has recently moved to Trump Parc, which she called "a lovely property."

Fedele welcomed the show's cast and crew to the area.

"Our perception of Hollywood is that these people come in and zoom out," he said. "But these people are coming in and setting down roots."

More importantly, the filming of "Are We There Yet?" has provided the state with a four to one return based on the production's use of Connecticut's film tax incentives, Fedele said. For every \$1 that is discounted by the state, the show injects \$4 into the economy.

"That's a great investment," Fedele said. "You would do that as a business, we should do that as a state. If you build it, they will come. It's another great day for Stamford."