

• A generous incentive program has lured significant TV and film production to the Big Easy.

• From Mardi Gras to Jazz Fest and countless other live music events, New Orleans is a cultural destination.

• Access to capital and renewed confidence make this city a good environment for startups.

NEW ORLEANS

THE CRESCENT CITY IS HARNESSING THE CREATIVITY OF THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY TO BOLSTER ITS ENTREPRENEURIAL LANDSCAPE.

IN THE SUMMER OF 2013, *NCIS* WRITER GARY GLASBERG WAS RESEARCHING STORY IDEAS FOR THE UPCOMING SEASON OF THE HIT CBS PROCEDURAL DRAMA WHEN HE CAME UPON THE REAL-LIFE NAVAL CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIVE SERVICE'S OFFICE IN NEW ORLEANS. Managed for 25 years by essentially one man—a "larger-than-life, eccentric, fantastic guy," Glasberg notes—the New Orleans *NCIS* stirred Glasberg's imagination, and he planned a two-part episode set in the city. When he pitched the idea to his producers, they realized that the setting could be an entire spin-off series. "New Orleans provides a wonderful backdrop of heart, soul, music, fun, food, celebration and history—not to mention amazing people," says Glasberg, now creator and executive producer of *NCIS: New Orleans*.



Musicians perform at the famed Maison Bourbon Jazz Club

COSMO CONDINA/GETTY IMAGES

Glasberg is hardly the only writer-producer attracted to the city. From 2012 to 2015, New Orleans hosted 60 productions, with feature films such as *Django Unchained*, *Lee Daniels' The Butler*, *Jurassic World* and *The Big Short*, and TV series including *Scream Queens*, and two seasons of *American Horror Story* all shot on its streets and soundstages. Driven by New Orleans, Louisiana earned the nickname "Hollywood South"—and surpassed California and all of Canada in the number of films produced during that period, according to the Los Angeles film office, FilmLA.

Film and TV producers like New Orleans for more than its ambience; they are enticed by a generous incentive program for the entertainment industry launched by the Louisiana Economic Development agency in 2002, a time when the city needed help. Long before Hurricane Katrina hit, New Orleans was in decline. "For more than 30 years, we hadn't been moving forward," says Michael Hecht, president and CEO of Greater New Orleans, a business development nonprofit that supports entrepreneurship in the city. "We were coasting on our railroad and shipping past, and drawing upon our two biggest resources—the energy industry and our unique culture—but not sustaining what we had or growing." Crime, corruption and a broken education system were also contributing to a "lack of confidence and community drive," remembers Tim Williamson, a native New Orleanian and cofounder of the Idea Village, a local business incubator that hosts the annual New Orleans Entrepreneur Week (see page 146). "The city didn't feel open to new ideas or people, and was losing its best local talent."

The incentive program—known as the Motion Picture Investor Tax Credit—perhaps the most generous of its kind in the country, helped turn things around and lure the entertainment industry to Louisiana—specifically New Orleans. Incentives include subsidies of up to 35 percent of a film's budget for productions with budgets of over \$300,000, as well as bonuses for

hiring local crew and engaging local businesses. Following the early success of this program, the state launched similar initiatives targeting sound recording, live performances and digital interactive media. The latter program, which includes tax credits for qualified payroll and software-development costs, was just getting started in 2005 when Katrina struck, and changed everything. As post-Katrina New Orleans saw an influx of innovative minds in architecture, sustainability, real estate and entrepreneurship, as well as an increase in out-of-state investments, the entertainment industry became a catalyst for the city's rebirth. Among the digital media companies that set up shop here was Gameloft, a French mobile-gaming designer that arrived in 2011. "We have a history of seeking out emerging cities, like Montreal, Bucharest and Guadalajara," says Mathias Royer, general manager of the New Orleans site—Gameloft's only U.S. location.

The booming production industry spawned other companies. In 2009, real estate developer Susan Brennan decided to turn the site of a stalled condo project into Second Line Stages, a state-of-the-art, LEED Gold-certified soundstage complex that has since hosted dozens of A-list productions, and houses offices for related businesses, from casting agents and post-production artists to Hollywood Trucks, an eco-friendly film-equipment transport company.

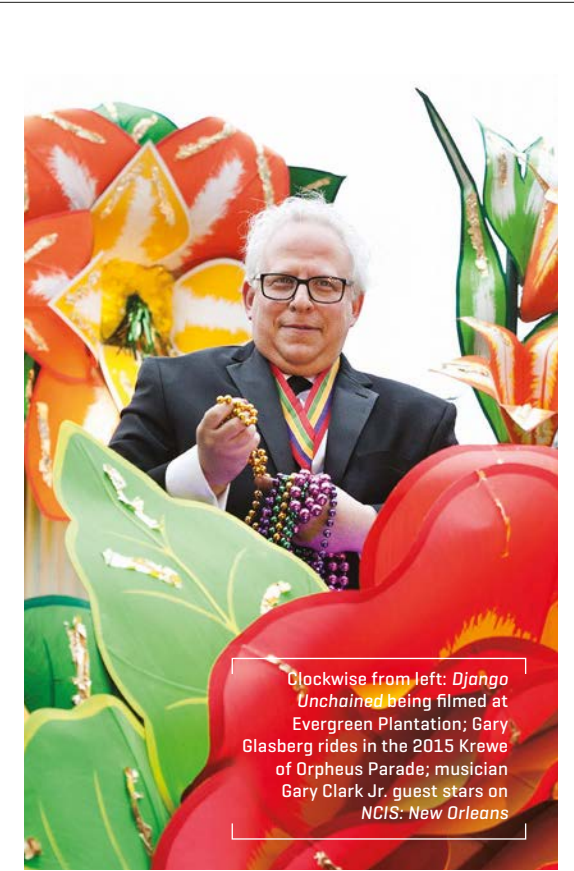
A budget crisis is making some state lawmakers try to chip away at the incentive plan, but the momentum of the past 14 years has produced a more diversified local economy. Entertainment now generates thousands of high-paying jobs for millennials who had never before encountered these opportunities in New Orleans. One example is Gary Solomon Jr., who after studying theatrical lighting design in New York at NYU's Tisch School, returned to New Orleans and in December 2008 cofounded the Solomon Group, an event-production company,



with five employees. Today it has more than 200 full-time workers and \$22 million in revenue. The company recently helped stage the live-from-NOLA television production *The Passion* for the Fox network. "This is a city that values eccentricity and creativity, where you can make a difference, see results and enjoy a dynamic quality of life," Solomon says. "I wouldn't want to do this anywhere else. This is where I want to eat, hear music and live."

That work-play-live culture shared among young professionals has helped spur the growth of the hospitality industry as well. In 2014, visitors to the city spent nearly \$7 billion, and the demand for new restaurants and hotels has revitalized neighborhoods that had not previously attracted tourism dollars, such as Treme, Faubourg Marigny, the South Market District and the emerging Warehouse Art District, home to the new Ace Hotel New Orleans. Chef Nina Compton, who owns Compère Lapin at the Old No. 77 Hotel & Chandlery in the warehouse area, first lived in town while competing on the 11th season of *Top Chef*. "I kept thinking of how I could get back. The city has such a pull and is also very supportive,"

DJANGO: ANDREW COPPER/THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY; NCIS: CBS PHOTO ARCHIVE; GLASBERG: ERIKA GOLDRING/GETTY IMAGES



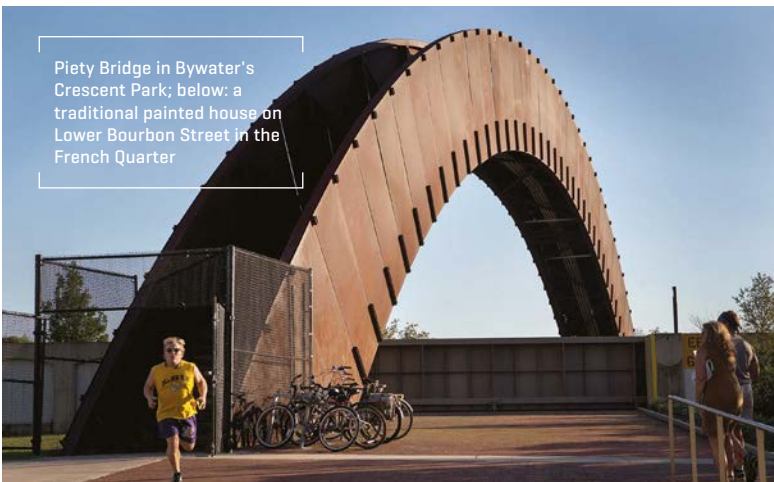
Clockwise from left: *Django Unchained* being filmed at Evergreen Plantation; Gary Glasberg rides in the 2015 Krewe of Orpheus Parade; musician Gary Clark Jr. guest stars on *NCIS: New Orleans*

Compton says. "Lots of people have thanked me for moving here"—something the Idea Village's Williamson might attribute to the prevailing "feeling of paying it forward, because we know we didn't do this alone."

Entertainment, too, has played a role in the growth of tourism. "A survey on how film and TV impacts visitor decisions revealed a huge change in the perception of the city," says Patrick Comer, founder and CEO of Lucid, a market-research software company that has become a major player in New Orleans' tech space. "Movies and TV shows are revealing the real culture, and then once you

come here, you realize there is no other New Orleans." In some cases, the city has doubled for other locations—such as 1963 Dallas for a JFK biopic—but often "New Orleans starts speaking to filmmakers, and they are inspired to change their scripts to feature the city," says Christopher Stelly, executive director of Louisiana Entertainment for Louisiana Economic Development. "It is such a deep, rich place that it often becomes a part of the story itself, much like New York or Paris." Case in point: *NCIS: New Orleans*. "We needed a setting that was so unique it functioned as a character on the show," says Glasberg.

As the city approaches its 300th anniversary in 2018, the local economy is strong, thanks to its new diversity—in contrast to the rest of Louisiana, which continues to rely on the constantly fluctuating energy sector. Violent crime is still a concern—the killing of former New Orleans Saints player Will Smith this spring cast a dark cloud over an otherwise prospering city—but the murder rate is at its lowest level in 40 years. Major initiatives such as the Reinventing the Crescent riverfront development plan—which will transform six miles of unused commercial and industrial space along the Mississippi River into parks, artisan booths, bike trails and an extended streetcar line—seek to reduce crime further while reinvigorating public spaces. At the development's heart is Crescent Park, a \$30 million linear park along 20 acres that opened its first phase in 2014 to great fanfare and national praise, allowing the city to capitalize on its momentum as one of the fastest-growing metro areas in the South. "People thought Katrina was the sad end to a declining city," says Greater New Orleans' Hecht. "But all this talent that 15 years ago wouldn't have come here is now helping to make us the next great American city." 🍷



Piety Bridge in Bywater's Crescent Park; below: a traditional painted house on Lower Bourbon Street in the French Quarter



CITYSCAPE

[WHERE TO WORK, INVEST AND PLAY IN NEW ORLEANS]



BUSINESS

➤ GREATER NEW ORLEANS

This public-private partnership supports local economic development and entrepreneurship by advising on incentive programs and growth strategies. 1100 Poydras St. #3475, Michael Hecht, president and CEO, mhecht@gnoinc.org, 504.527.6900, gnoinc.org

➤ POWERMOVES.NOLA

A business accelerator for minority entrepreneurs, this startup has gained national recognition for the rapid success of its fellowship program, pitch competitions and boot camp. Leslie Jacobs, founder, 504.408.1038, powermovesnola.org

➤ PROPELLER

A startup incubator that focuses on making a positive social or environmental impact, particularly in the areas of food security, water management, healthcare and educational equity. 4035 Washington Ave., Andrea Chen, executive director, achen@gopropeller.org, 504.345.9836, gopropeller.org



HOTELS

➤ ACE HOTEL NEW ORLEANS

Opened in March, the Roman and Williams-designed hotel draws crowds to the Warehouse Art District with its lobby bar, rooftop lounge and live music venue, 3 Keys. 600 Carondelet St., Jason Deibler, general manager, jason.deibler@acehotel.com, 504.900.1180, acehotel.com/neworleans

➤ HENRY HOWARD HOTEL

This new 18-room Garden District hotel is set in an 1867 townhouse-style mansion. The property melds original elements with custom furnishings and artwork, vintage pieces and musical instruments. 2041 Prytania St., Amy-Lynn Peláez, general manager, amy.lynn@henryhowardhotel.com, 504.313.1577, henryhowardhotel.com

➤ WINDSOR COURT HOTEL

Tucked behind a private courtyard near Canal Street, this nearly all-suite classic is a favorite of visiting celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Will Ferrell. 300 Gravier St., David Teich, general manager, dteich@windsorcourthotel.com, 504.596.4780, windsorcourthotel.com



RESTAURANTS

➤ THE CATAHOULA HOTEL CAFE AND PISCO BAR

The intimate bar and restaurant at this 35-room boutique hotel serves dishes showcasing Peruvian cuisine. Its modern pisco cocktails are a must-try. 914 Union St., Catie Mustacato, general manager, catie@catahoulahotel.com, 504.603.2442, catahoulahotel.com

➤ PÊCHE SEAFOOD GRILL

Winner of two James Beard Awards—for best new restaurant and best regional chef—this welcome addition to the Warehouse Art District melds inventive seafood cuisine with simple preparation and a casual decor. 800 Magazine St., 504.522.1744, peche-restaurant.com

➤ SQUARE ROOT

With seating around an open kitchen, Square Root features molecular gastronomy done right: Mad-scientist chefs create playful, flavor-packed dishes served with expert wine pairings. 1800 Magazine St., Maximilian G. Ortiz, co-owner, mgo@rebelrestaurantgroup.com, 504.309.7800, squarerootnola.com



EXPERIENCES

➤ BESPOKE EXPERIENCES

Whether you want private access to working artists' studios, a VIP night at a concert or just a warm Café du Monde beignet without waiting in line, Bespoke can make it happen. Jennifer Simpson, chief experience officer, jennifer@bespokeprivatetours.com, 504.534.8874, bespokeprivatetours.com

➤ PEOPLES HEALTH NEW ORLEANS JAZZ MARKET

The sleek new home base of Irvin Mayfield and the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra is part modern concert hall—guests and performers can text drink orders to the bar—part jazz archive and part community hangout, with a lobby bar and family programming. 1436 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd., Sarah Bell, development coordinator, sbell@thenojo.com, 504.913.0575, phnojm.org

CRESCENT PARK: SAMANTHA KAPLAN/GETTY IMAGES; HOUSE: TIM GRAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

HENRY HOWARD HOTEL: KATHLEEN FITZGERALD; PEOPLES HEALTH JAZZ: JEANNE LACOMBE