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Shreveport, La. Unlikely Star Gets Ready For Hollywood Close Up

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Shreveport/Bossier Film Office

A wave tank was built in Shreveport for filming of "The Guardian," a movie about Coast Guard rescuers.

By the Numbers

Shreveport-Bossier City, La.	June	
	2007	2006
Office vacancy	13%	13%
Avg. rent/s.f.	\$12.45	\$12.25
Industrial vacancy	20%	26%
Avg. rent/s.f.	\$3.03	\$3.07
Retail vacancy	12%	11%
Avg. rent/s.f.	\$14.88	\$13.71
Median home price	\$137,100	\$136,100

Sources: The Center for Business and Economic Research at Louisiana State University in Shreveport; Natl. Assn. of Realtors
Note: Home prices are for the second quarter.

Film production in Louisiana was one of many industries facing an uncertain future in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Since then, filmmakers have given more consideration to areas of the state far away from the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast, such as Shreveport, which is located in Louisiana's northwest corner. New Hollywood-fueled projects in Shreveport include a film-production facility to be built in a low-income neighborhood once home to the city's red-light district.

Los Angeles-based Nu Image plans to begin construction by year end on a 100,000-square-foot, three-building complex that will be located on about seven acres leased from the city. Nu Image has made several movies in northwest Louisiana, including the soon-to-be released "Mad Money" starring Diane Keaton and Queen Latifah.

The film industry is a somewhat improbable newcomer to the Shreveport-Bossier City metropolitan area, home to nearly 400,000 residents. The region counts Barksdale Air Force Base, manufacturers, casinos and the health-care industry among its largest employers. "If I'd have said three years ago that we were going to be a hot spot for the film industry I would have been laughed out of the room," says Kurt Foreman, senior vice president for the Northwest Louisiana Economic Development Foundation.

State tax incentives -- which began in 2002 -- are a big part of the draw. They now include transferable tax credits for motion-picture production in Louisiana and a return of about 40 cents in transferable tax credits for every dollar spent on film-related infrastructure projects approved by the state.

Many are hopeful the movie industry is in Shreveport to stay -- though building up a local labor force with the skills necessary to make films is a challenge.

About 12 television and movie productions with total budgets of about \$300 million were shot in the Shreveport area from August 2005 through the end of 2006, says Arlena Acree, director of film, media and entertainment for Shreveport. To date this year, 14 productions with budgets totaling \$160 million have

been produced in the area and as many as a dozen are in pre-production. Among Shreveport's early wins: a wave pool built to simulate the Bering Sea in "The Guardian," a movie filmed in the area in 2005 and 2006 that starred Kevin Costner, Ms. Acree says.

Nearly every sector of the commercial and residential real-estate market has benefited from the influx. The industrial market, which has struggled in recent years, perhaps has had the most to gain. The vacancy rate in industrial space has dropped to 20% in June from 26% in 2006, according to a report by the Center for Business and Economic Research at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. Cinelease LLC, based in Burbank, Calif., recently leased about 18,000 square feet of warehouse space where it stores lighting and other equipment it provides to the film industry.

The state's film industry has had its share of controversy. A former director of the Louisiana film commission pleaded guilty last month before a U.S. District judge to accepting cash bribes in return for approving fraudulently inflated movie budgets from a film-production company between 2003 and 2005. The state legislature has worked to tighten loopholes in the law, and Jim Letten, U.S. States Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana, says he thinks the continuing investigation will have a positive effect on the state's film industry by ensuring a level playing field.