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Lights, camera, money for Michigan

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By Joe LaFurgey

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) -- Ninety filmmakers have expressed an interest in filming in Michigan since tax breaks were authorized. That compares to six film proposals all of last year in the state.

One of those films ready to begin production in June in Grand Rapids is "The Fifth Mafia." The film crew is also scouting areas near Newaygo and Gun Lake.

Director Vito Giambalvo walked the scene in Grand Rapids and blocked it in Hollywood talk with 24 Hour News 8 Wednesday.

His crew will transform a downtown bank into one from Guatemala.

"It's the dark wood and everything. It feels more like a third world country," he said of the bank's interior.

Select Bank on Monroe Center is exactly what he is looking for in his movie about family, revenge and money. The bank will get shot up in the climactic scene of "The Fifth Mafia."

The city of Grand Rapids will also play itself in the movie.

"It moves from Grand Rapids to Los Angeles, to Guatemala, back to Grand Rapids," said Giambalvo.

The film is the first to take advantage of Michigan's new film incentive program - a tax break up to 42 percent. A big part of the film's \$6 million budget will be spent in Grand Rapids.

"I know that just off the top of my head, just in the housing, the hotels and stuff, and it's at least \$600,000," said Giambalvo.

They expect to save more than \$2 million thanks to the tax break.

"I think the floodgates have been opened, actually. Clint Eastwood is already talking about coming (to the state for a new film). I don't know what part of Michigan he's talking about...I think Detroit," said Giambalvo.

As "The Fifth Mafia" proves, West Michigan is bound to get some of that business. 24 Hour News 8 has learned the city of Grand Rapids has reinvented the Special Events Office as the Office of Film, Music and Special Events. The office will help filmmakers get permits and line up resources for them.

"It's already been a lot of work with "The Fifth Mafia" coming to town. I've had a video shot for the Audi A5 last week. And chances are there'll be a lot of movies headed out way over the next several months," said Todd Tofferi of the Events Office.

"We already have another movie on the table that we're talking about, and we may come back here," said Giambalvo.

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