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News

Film event draws more than 1,000

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By CHARLES CRUMM
Of The Oakland Press

Mike Andaluz was passing out flyers for his new business RayZooMay, which he plans to open on Pike Street in downtown Pontiac.

He was among more than 1,100 people who attended a movie making networking event Saturday at The Crofoot Ballroom in Pontiac, the first of its kind in the area.

"When I heard about it, I said, 'I can't miss it.'" said Andaluz, who works in the human resources end of the film business offering performing arts preparation services, such as video resumes.

"A lot of people are looking for work here and don't know how to put together a performing arts resume," he said.

By noon, when the six-hour event began, two lines were down the sidewalk in front of the building.

"You couldn't see the front of the building," Andaluz said.

Attendees at the event crammed both floors of the ballroom wearing color coded tags to make the networking go smoother.

A red sticker indicated talent, green was for production, blue was for professional services and lime green was for services such as catering.

Everyone who attended received a free digital directory of the contact information for everyone else there.

Alex Greene, of Vanir Entertainment in Rochester Hills, said networking events are needed to boost Michigan's film industry.

"For the entire incentive package to work and for the industry to grow, this is key," Greene said. "It's a new frontier for us."

An additional networking event is planned for June or July, he said.

Driving the event, and the film industry in Michigan, are tax credits and incentives for movie makers passed into law by the Legislature last year.

The heart of the incentives is a 40 percent refundable tax credit for filming in Michigan with an extra 2 percent credit for film expenses made in distressed communities.

The package also contains credits for worker training.

Interest in the film industry has also grown because of the state's unemployment rate, the highest in the nation.

Upstairs at the ballroom and asleep on the couch was five-year-old actor Harley Cole Collins, who was there with his mother, Stephanie Collins, and grandmother, Fran Amos, a former Waterford state lawmaker.

Harley has already appeared in film, theater and commercials as well as the North American International Auto Show.

Stephanie Collins said they were there "to get in touch with people who do casting for movies and commercials."

Amos recalled that prior to the film incentives passed in 2008, the Michigan Film Office was just a one-person office.

"I'm impressed with all the people here and all the interest," Amos said. "To see this exponentially explode like this is very rewarding to me."

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