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—BILLY ALFORD  
WILMINGTON SET DRESSER

tion assistant to \$2,000 a week for a department head. Local retirees and others also do a brisk business as extras, pocketing \$50 to \$100 a day.

Despite its glamorous image, movie-making is a long, often tedious business. Seventy-two-hour work weeks are the norm. And because most North Carolina crew members don't work with a union contract, their pay is lower and they don't get benefits such as health insurance or retirement plans. "I can work in this industry for 20 years and when I'm done, I've got whatever I came out of it with," says Billy Alford, a 35-year-old Wilmington set dresser.

Bryan Unger, a union organizer with the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees in New York, says the lowest level crew members in North Carolina earn from \$12 to \$14 per hour with no benefits for what essentially is temporary work. That compares to a rate of about \$20 an hour with benefits for similar work in union states.

Unger says movie producers pay less and provide fewer benefits in North Carolina, both because the state is promoted to the trade as a right-to-work state and because North Carolina's movie industry is rooted in the anti-union sentiments of De Laurentiis. "If

you allow employers to come in and treat North Carolinians like second-class citizens, they will do exactly that," says Unger. Many of the higher-paid workers on a set, he says, are still imported from out-of-state.<sup>9</sup>

But Kent Swaim, executive director of Carolco Studios Inc., disagrees sharply with Unger's portrayal of the North Carolina movie industry. Swaim says the hourly minimum wage for film workers in New York is actually \$18 an hour—lower than the \$20 mentioned by Unger but perhaps still too high to be competitive.

"Just maybe the union crew rates in New York might be part of the reason fewer movies are being filmed in New York," says Swaim. "Wilmington

## *The One That Got Away*

**A**s director of the North Carolina Film Office, Bill Arnold has been at least partially responsible for bringing 190 movies to the state in the last 13 years. But one that stands out in his mind is the one that got away.

Barbra Streisand had been planning to make "The Prince of Tides" in South Carolina for more than a year when executives at MGM asked her to take a look at North Carolina. They were familiar with the state's crew base and felt costs could be controlled better here, Arnold says.

For two days, Arnold escorted Streisand around the state in a motor home, showing her potential locations. "We went to elaborate extremes to keep her under wraps," he says, including having a Highway Patrol advance team. Arnold also flew the entire length of the North Carolina coast in a state-owned airplane, taking photographs of isolated coves and inlets that might work for the movie.

On Figure Eight Island, Streisand fell in love with a house she felt would be perfect for the film. When told that the private island did not allow movie shooting under any circumstances, she asked them to make an exception for her. "They wouldn't even consider it," Arnold says.

In the end, "The Prince of Tides" stayed in South Carolina, as author Pat Conroy wrote it, and the movie went on to be nominated for seven Academy Awards in 1992.<sup>1</sup>

—Sharon Overton

### FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Line producer Shel Shrager, whose "Prince of Tides" project went to South Carolina, six months later brought "The Last of the Mohicans" to North Carolina.