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SOUTH SHORE INSIDER - Rick DiGregorio finding his niche in Norwell

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The Patriot Ledger

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A small-scale production company started by Rick DiGregorio called North River Films is helping local high school athletes gain visibility in the fierce competition for college scholarships.

DiGregorio started North River Films in the mid-1990s and started his newest venture - called High School Athlete Spotlight - within the last month.

Over the years, DiGregorio has worked for NBC as a supervising producer and writer for several soap operas, directed "America's Most Wanted" and was the co-creator of ESPN's "Sidelines" program.

The Norwell resident, who runs his business from his home, has worked with nearly every aspect of film production on documentaries and television commercials. He now is focusing on creating videos for foundations, small companies and local athletes.

Photos

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Founder and director Rick DiGregorio of North River Films. He has 30 years of experience in network television, cable and commercial television and is seen at his Norwell editing station, Tuesday, May, 24, 2011.

What prompted you to start North River Films?

I had established (North River Films) originally in the mid-1990s when I was working for ABC. I said I am going to take North River Films and really try and make a go of it in the Boston area and see if I can find a niche. ... (From) 2005 until now, it has been trying to find out what is it North River Films does. As it turns out, what we do is a lot of independent projects ... documentaries (and) fundraising films.

Are there benefits to being located on the East Coast as opposed to being a small-scale production company in California?

The difference is the amount of work. If you are a small production company out in L.A., if you have any talent whatsoever, you are always working. The hardest job on the East Coast, especially for a small production company, is constantly finding work. There is just a limited amount of opportunity. You have to really want to be here. I find that most of my work is finding work.

What kind of success have you had with the creation

I have been approaching coaches, clubs and high schools and the like. I think the issue is price point. You can have a recruiting video done for \$300 to \$500 from some fly-by-night group that will go in and film a game and then put a little circle around your kid with an arrow that says that's him.

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of your new division, High School Athlete Spotlight?

I'm doing custom-made films. I used to shoot for ESPN. I shot for NESN. I know how to shoot sports. It's always focused on your kid.

It's less for the very elite athletes because the very elite athletes have already been recruited when they were 4 years old. There's that next tier of athletes who never were the star of the team, but they are really good. The (Division 1) teams need athletes - there are only so many stars - so they need that second tier of athlete who is dependable, who works hard, who knows the fundamentals of the game. These videos, if they are done properly, show that your kid knows how to do that.

Are there tax credits available to you for work on various projects? How has this helped North River Films?

I did a documentary that lasted two years as North River Films that I did get a (state) tax incentive on. I think the budget for that was \$500,000. The executive producers were able to apply for the tax incentive on it and that helped a lot.

Basically what (the state film tax credits) have helped is it is helping the day laborers. ... The advantage is not to me per se, it's to the community as a whole. It keeps a thriving film community because it's forcing companies from out of town to come in and hire local people.

When you hire local people, the local people work more, they get more experience, so now there's a very experienced, highly-skilled pool of people in Boston that can work on features. . It's been such a windfall for this business, it's unbelievable. I don't think anyone has really vocalized it properly as to how important it's been for an entire industry.

No movies were coming to Boston without the tax incentive, and now we've got a ton of movies coming to Boston, dropping all this money here. ... I have a lot of friends in the film business who were on unemployment until this tax incentive and now they are all working.

What do you see for the future of production companies on the South Shore and in Boston?

I think as long (as the state is) competitive with the tax incentives, I don't see it disappearing. People are still going to have to make movies and they are still going to come here to do it. The only thing that will keep them away is making it incredibly expensive because that kept them away for years and years.

What do you see for the future of high quality video production?

I think the next work, the next video evolution is going to be the proliferation of web video. I think every website in the world has to have video on it. Now people are realizing it has to be good video. Now every laptop has a high definition screen. . They are beginning to understand the importance of good video and that people actually expect it. The video that is being produced now, a lot of it is going directly to people's websites. But it's high end video as opposed to the YouTube stuff.

What kind of projects are you currently looking for?

What I would like to do, if the opportunity arises, I would like to jump on another TV show. That's like playing the lottery. ... So that's always something I am looking at doing. My bread and butter right now has been foundations and small corporations. I've gotten pretty good at doing these fundraising kind of pieces. They are not big money makers (for me), but they are fun. You get to tell a great story. The organizations are usually really high end and are doing a lot of good and so I get to use my

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storytelling skills and my abilities to go out and help them raise money to keep going. ... It's rewarding work, it's fun and I'm at the point now where I just want to do things that are fun.

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