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Brooks Gets 'producers' Credit; Pic Stays In NY

By Paul J. Gough

Mel Brooks said Tuesday that his movie musical "The Producers" will begin filming in February at a new studio in Brooklyn because of a new tax credit designed to bring more movies to New York.

The Universal Pictures film stars Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick in the roles they played on Broadway; Nicole Kidman and Will Ferrell co-star. It's scheduled for release at Christmas 2005.

While the movie is all about New York — taking place in Central Park and elsewhere in Manhattan — Brooks said that without the new state-supported tax credit, it couldn't have been filmed there.

"It was breaking my heart to think we'd have to go to Bucharest, to Vancouver, to Toronto to mimic this incredible city," Brooks said during a news conference on a soundstage at the newly opened 15-acre Steiner Studios at the Brooklyn Naval Yard. Brooks was joined by the film's director, Susan Stroman, studio executives and a host of politicians, including Gov. George Pataki and Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

In recent years, New York has lost out on film and episodic TV production to less costly locales in Canada. But an initiative by Steiner Studios — as well as Kaufman Astoria Studios and Silvercup Studios — led to a tax-credit bill that Pataki signed into law Tuesday afternoon.

"We'll be able to make movies about New York in New York," Pataki said.

The Empire State Film Production Tax Credit gives a 10% tax credit for production costs on feature films, TV movies, pilots or series as long they meet certain rules, including spending at least 75% of production costs in New York. The state has allotted \$25 million in tax credits per year to be divvied up by qualifying productions. In addition, Bloomberg said Tuesday that the city is working to authorize an additional 5% tax credit for qualified productions but that it hadn't been approved yet.

"It takes away the competitive benefit that other places have had," said Pataki, who dutifully wore a "GOV" sign on the back of his jacket in honor of Brooks' classic film "Blazing Saddles."

Bloomberg said that film and TV production in New York generates about \$5 billion and 100,000 jobs a year, not just in the industry but also in support roles.

Steiner Studios chairman Douglas Steiner said that his company had sought input from a range of Hollywood figures, from top executives and actors to gaffers and grips. The message: Be big, efficient and cost-competitive.

"We had to narrow the cost differential between New York and Canada," Steiner said. "We have done that and we'll continue to." Stroman said the filming will begin Feb. 21 and continue for 70 days, including outdoor scenes in Central Park.

Brooks recalled filming the original "Producers" in and around Lincoln Center in 1967 and said he is lucky to be able to film in New York again, 37 years later.

"Without the tax credit, the horrible truth is that this film would have been made in Kabul, whatever the cheapest place to film," Brooks said. "Vancouver, maybe." He said nothing could compare to the quality and dynamism of New York — or the bagels.

"You go to Toronto, they're mushy," Brooks joked.