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My name is Mariah Bergeron from Biddeford, and I work full time in the media world here in Maine and elsewhere.

I pivoted my occupation during the pandemic from over a decade of bartending in Portland, to film and commercial work across Maine.

The majority of my work is in the art department - art direction, props, wardrobe, set dressing, etc, though I also work as an actor on-screen and for voice.

Some of my income comes from commercial work that shoots on location here in Maine, which has allowed me to subsidize participating the lesser-paying and less available narrative film and television work that occasionally comes up to the state.

Through the connections made on those narrative sets, I've been brought to other states to work on projects with bigger names, and bigger budgets, getting to do the work I'm most interested in making on a rate that I can afford to take.

It is the work in those other states that grants me the most job leverage.

Namedropping, budget-talk, and sentences that start obnoxiously with "In New York..." get my foot in a lot more doors.

On those sets, when I get to say I'm from Maine, folks always get a glow about them. On one project, executive produced by John Leguizamo, actor Robert Burke reminisced about his time in Camden in 1996's adaptation of Stephen King's "Thinner." "The Wire"'s Isaiah Whitlock Jr talked of his love for L.L. Bean in Freeport, and going fishing with friends. On another project, Richard Kind spoke of his love for the Ogunquit Playhouse, but regretted not having any opportunities to film in Maine.

A lot of my specific work involves money and budgets. It's my job to make the right look and feel for each project, within the parameters given. Those parameters, in general, are the budget and the timeframe. On low or no-budget jobs, items are purchased from big box stores and promptly returned for full value. An economic zero, or loss.

When a project has the ability to provide a reasonable budget, those items are generally sourced and purchased locally.

Aesthetically speaking, buying locally allows for less generic and more authentic props and set dressing. Strategically, there isn't time once a shoot gets going to rent and ship, say, a couch from an out-of-state props warehouse. I buy from local stores and local folks, off Craigslist and Uncle Henry's - anywhere I can access items quickly and directly. That money goes directly to my fellow Mainers.

Any items I can keep after a shoot get put into my props stock and rented for future projects, which adds to my potential income and the stockpile of available on-hand props in the state.

The list is long of how money from production sets gets into states' economies. We're all aware of how great food catapulted Maine onto the center stage, and local small business food has fed every set I've ever been on here. If the location is too far for folks to drive home safely, I get put up for the night and live like a tourist. Consider that every production is like a huge family of tourists, who have the same basic needs, and then a ton of other budgetary necessities, which means spending money locally.

I notice every time Patrick Dempsey or Anna Kendrick is highlighted in a Maine magazine for the promotion of one thing or another. Film festivals, including MIFF and CIFF, expand every year, drawing more attendees and celebrities to those towns, which those towns in turn leverage for their own marketing. Just the name "Stephen King" is a swirling economy of it's own, and every adaptation produced somewhere else feels like a sad disservice, as well as a missed opportunity.

Working in this field has not only brought more satisfaction and excitement into my life, it's brought me out of the low-income bracket and into a more financially stable

position, especially - unfortunately - when I'm able to work on those larger out-of-state jobs.

If more film work happened here, those coveted bigger names, with bigger budgets, would keep me and my work in state, and allow me to hire locally for art department teams.

And if Maine is looking to retain it's younger workforce, give them a reason not to move to Los Angeles or New York. Give them a job opportunity right here.