



# Cherokee Nation Opens Screen Doors to Martin Scorsese, Other Big-Budget Shoots

By [Todd Longwell](#)



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When producer **Gerald Webb** came to Claremore, Okla., to shoot “A Christmas ... Present” in late September, he knew the production would get great small-town Middle America looks and, more importantly, an exceptionally good deal.

Because Claremore is located within the [Cherokee Nation](#), which covers 7,000 square-miles in the northeastern corner of the state, the telefilm (which premieres Nov. 27 on the Great American Family Network) not only qualified for Oklahoma’s film and TV rebate, which can range from 20% to 38%, it was also able to take advantage of the tribe’s incentive program, which includes a 20% cash rebate on wages for Native American below-the-line workers, with an additional 5% uplift for Native Americans who are members of the Cherokee Nation or reside within its borders, as well as 20% on all local spend.

What **Webb** didn’t expect were the frozen treats.

During a shoot at the First Presbyterian Church in Claremore, “we came out for lunch and the pastor said, ‘We got a snow cone maker here as a gift to your production for being so

kind to us,” recalls **Webb**. “When you’re working 12- and sometimes 14-hour days, any little bump is really great for the energy of the set.”

At the government level, the Cherokee Nation is also eager, willing and, most importantly, able to make shoots as smooth and enjoyable as possible.

“I can pick up the phone and call our chief [Chuck Hoskin Jr.] and say, ‘We’ve got a film that wants to close this county road,’” says Jennifer Loren, director of Cherokee Nation Film and Original Content. “We’ve never had to say no because we just have this tight-knit organization with lots of connections.”

The Cherokee Nation was put on the production map along with the rest of the state in 2021 when the Filmed in Oklahoma Act was signed into law, upping the annual cap on the state’s film and TV rebate from \$8 million to \$30 million, attracting more and bigger projects, including Martin Scorsese’s upcoming period epic “Killers of the Flower Moon,” starring Leonardo DiCaprio, and the Sylvester Stallone series “Tulsa King.”

The Cherokee Nation’s incentive is a substantial sweetener to the state’s program in terms of raw percentages, but its \$1 million annual cap means it can only provide impactful additional savings to low-budget productions.

Fortunately, the tribe has other things to offer in addition to its incentive, including Cherokee Film Studios, Owasso Campus, a state-of-the-art 27,000-sq.-ft. production complex 15 minutes from Tulsa Airport. Opened in July, it features a 9,000-sq.-ft. extended reality soundstage with an LED volume and a Vicon Vantage Mocap system.

The Cherokee Nation can also provide a variety of scenic settings in addition to the rural towns and grassy plains the state is famous for. In the east, it has the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, with evergreen forests, spring-fed creeks and waterfalls. It also contains a portion of the city of Tulsa, which can be used to double as other big metropolitan cities.

The Cherokee Nation further demonstrated its commitment to becoming a production hub last month when it hired Oklahoma Film + Music Office director Tava Maloy Sofsky to be the new tribe’s film commissioner and director of the Cherokee Nation Film Office.

Sofsky points that while the incentive’s primary goal is to create industry jobs for citizens of the Cherokee Nation, it also offers cash rebates on the wages of non-Native below the line workers – 15% for state residents and 10% for out-of-state residents.

“We have a lot of training initiatives that we’re supporting and we need the experts in the field here working, no matter their background,” says Sofsky.

<https://variety.com/2022/film/spotlight/cherokee-nation-1235443807/>