

Studio owned by Weekly World News is making zombie movies and more in Vineland

written by [ROSEMARY PARRILLO](#) August 16, 2023



Weekly World News Studios in Vineland.

JEFF HARRIS

When Greg D'Alessandro was searching for a place to establish a film production studio, a fellow producer suggested he take a look at Vineland, an agricultural community in the far southwestern section of the state.

Vineland may be New Jersey's most laid-back city. If New York is a town that never sleeps, you could say Vineland is a town that's apt to take a nap now and then. Known more for annual Dandelion Dinners than Oscar after-parties, this quiet Cumberland County community would not be on anyone's short list for film locations.



GREG D'ALESSANDRO

But after touring the area and a nearly 40,000-square-foot, two-story building in the heart of downtown, D'Alessandro, CEO and editor-in chief-of Weekly World News, decided Vineland would do just fine after all.

It didn't hurt that the city was eager to offer economic incentives for the company to move into the city's Urban Enterprise Zone as part of the town's continuing efforts to revitalize the business district along Landis Avenue.

So last September, Weekly World News, an online and social media site that publishes fictional and satirical news, also officially became New Jersey's latest film studio, with initial plans to produce three movies in Vineland featuring its established fictional characters.

Zombies will reign — at least for now.

The company's first movie, "Zombie Wedding," just wrapped up and D'Alessandro couldn't be happier about the marriage, both with the film and the real estate arrangement.

"Vineland is the perfect place for building our business," he said. "There are wide-open spaces. And the center of town looks like any Main Street. It could be anywhere USA."

It is hard, however, to imagine anywhere else in the USA where a town would be willing to invest in a zombie movie. Yes, Vineland owns a share of "Zombie Wedding" as part of the deal, having made a \$1 million investment through the Vineland Development Corp.

"We're a partner on just the first movie," said Sandra Forosisky, the city's economic development director. "Like other equity investors, once they sell the movie, we get paid back first, and if it's profitable we will share in the revenue. So we're excited. The mayor (Anthony Fanucci) is very supportive of having Vineland become a film-shooting destination.

"Even if 'Zombie Wedding' doesn't succeed, the fact that they have a studio here and are bringing new business into the community ... that's exactly what economic development is supposed to do."

During three weeks of filming "Zombie Wedding" last fall, Weekly World News Studio (WWNS) said it already has pumped more than \$800,000 into the local economy through employment, accommodations and dining at the city's many downtown ethnic restaurants.

"We just want to give back to the community," said D'Alessandro, 63, who lives in Ho-Ho-Kus and still maintains a home in Culver City, a suburb of Los Angeles. "It's a lot cheaper for us to operate here than in L.A. It's very good for filming."

If Weekly World News sounds familiar, it's because the company was founded as a supermarket tabloid in 1979, printed in black and white and featuring sensational headlines such as "FBI Captures Bat Child" and "I Married Bigfoot."

Today, you can find its oddball content at weeklyworldnews.com, where the zombie apocalypse is always just around the corner, and where mutants and biblical prophecies remain top "news" items. It's as if the Onion staff was abducted by aliens and forced to work at WWN.

D'Alessandro said he started pitching stories to WWN while in film school, and the relationship grew from there. He holds two MFAs in screenwriting from USC's School of Cinematic Arts and UCLA's School of Film, Television and Digital Media. He has written 5,000 stories for the site and helped

create and/or popularize some of its recurring fictional characters, the most famous of which is Bat Boy.

Now, with a mandate to take WWN to the next level and establish a full-blown entertainment division, D'Alessandro, who was born in Camden and grew up in Franklin Lakes, sees New Jersey as the place to plant the company flag. The state has been expanding its film and digital media tax credit program since 2018 and has established itself as more user-friendly than not only California, but even more affordable areas of the South, such as Georgia.

"I've been telling everybody in L.A. that they need to take a look at New Jersey," he said.

WWNS, which has a 15-year lease/purchase agreement with Vineland, will operate under the direction of D'Allesandro and partners Grace Lovret, Krysanne Katsoolis and Joseph Clark. It also will house a nearly million-dollar state-of-the art Volumetric technology system they hope will entice other film companies to use the facility. D'Alessandro describes Volumetrics as the most sophisticated virtual filmmaking environment available.

"It's an LED screen that you can think of as the intersection of gaming and filmmaking, with a little bit of theater thrown in," he said. "It's a gigantic leap up from green screens. Actors can now engage in their environment and feel where they are, rather than interacting with a wall of green."

This virtual backdrop allows producers to switch locations without the need to travel, lowering production costs. This, D'Allesandro said, will lead to increased profits.

Forosisky said the city is in the process of making some structural changes in the studio's building, known as Landis Marketplace, to accommodate the Volumetric system. "They're investing in this to bring in outside companies to film here, which will bring more business into town," she said. "That's the plan."



"Zombie Wedding" actors Deepti Menon and Jay DeYonker.

The WWNS arrangement aligns with the town's efforts to diversify its agricultural economy by turning to entertainment and sports projects.

For example, the Landis Theater, a former Art Deco-era movie house, was renovated in 2010 with Vineland Development Corp. funds and then sold in 2019 to Gaslight Theatrical Productions, which presents live music and theater.

Also, work will begin next year on Trout National — The Reverse, a golf course located on a 280-acre site on Vineland's east side. Owned by Mike Trout, a Millville native and standout Los Angeles Angels centerfielder, and designed by Tiger Woods' company TGR Design, the course is expected to open in 2025.

Next up will be a sports complex, now in the early stages of development, said Forosisky.

In the meantime, D'Alessandro hopes WWNS will become a hub for Jersey filmmakers. In the next five years, the writer/producer envisions the company as a bustling studio, making movies, TV programs, music videos and podcasts, along with continuing to train locals to work as crew members behind the scenes.

But whatever the future holds, there will always be zombies.

A film trilogy of undead domestic life is part of the long-term plan. "Zombie Wedding" will be followed by "Zombie Family Values" and "Zombie Divorce."

"It's all in good fun," D'Alessandro said.

Anyone interested in producing film projects at the Weekly World News Studio can contact Greg D'Alessandro at greg@weeklyworldnews.com or (310) 403-3742.