

THE City Paper *online*

NorthStar brings TV to Tennessee

By M.B. Owens, bowens@nashvillecitypaper.com
December 29, 2004

Nashville is known as Music City. But NorthStar Studios is making the case it should also be known as Television City. The studio is making major inroads in "small screen" broadcasting.

There are very few turnkey television, network and mobile production companies under one roof. Because of that capability, NorthStar has a lot of big name clients - the NCAA, NFL, ESPN, America's Dumbest Criminals, Home Shopping Network and Gospel Music Television to name a few.

When storms repeatedly hit Florida this past hurricane season, the Nashville studios were used by Home Shopping Network, which needed an alternative location because of power losses at its home base in the Tampa area.

The multifaceted complex, just north of downtown Nashville, is comprised of a 125,000-square-foot building on 16 acres prepped for creativity and technological wizardry.

At any one time, productions can be going on in each of its seven studios, either recorded or live. And if productions are needed somewhere else, there are two equipment-filled trucks with technical support people who can bring production services to offsite locations anywhere in the U.S. All have satellite uplink capability.

"We have a very diversified client base, 80 percent of which is found outside of Nashville," said Grant Barbre, general manager of NorthStar. Barbre previously worked for nationally known companies, including Walt Disney. "There is a lot of entrepreneurial work done here for broadcasting and the music industry."

The types of productions are as diverse as the client base.

Last summer NorthStar re-signed with the Tennessee Titans in a multi-year contract to provide in-stadium production during game days. The company has provided services to the team since arriving in 1999, but only for one-year deals until 2004.

Earlier in the year, RFD-TV relocated its operations from Dallas to the Nashville studio complex. From there the 24-hour network dedicated to showcasing rural America, distributes its programming to all 50 states on basic channels of DIRECTTV and DISH Network.

"Nashville and NorthStar Studios were chosen over other possible locations not only because of its facilities and its historical role as an entertainment center, but because of its rich...heritage," said Patrick Gottsch, president of RFD-TV at the time of his network's first broadcast in April at the new location.

Recently, four episodes for a TV pilot were recorded at NorthStar during a two-day period. The show, called *In The Know* is to be shown on the PAX channel starting in January.

Observing the action shows the level of complexity required for a production and the detail needed by the camera crew, lighting director, sound director, stage managers, script assistant, producer and others to mold everything to near artistic perfection.

Sitting next to his production staff in one of the sophisticated media trucks outside the studio complex, Steve Angus, producer and director at NorthStar, watched multiple screens in front of him



Comedic singer Tim Wilson performs for host Tanya Memme in front of a live audience for TV pilot at NorthStar Studios. Photo by M.J. Masotti Jr.

that are displayed from five cameras on the set and barked out orders instantly followed by the appropriate crew member. (The control rooms in the complex were not available because other shows were going on at the same time.)

"Push one (camera) and dissolve one - standby for four (camera)," Angus instructs while waving his hand. On the main screen, the scene fades out and then is picked up from another angle.

This is continued every few seconds shifting from camera to camera, scene to scene. Action is stopped only when the performance is over or to repeat the action because something is not quite right.

If necessary, the writer is called in and asked to make changes in the script delivered by the host, Tanya Memme, flown in from Los Angeles for the four shows.

On Friday the recorded shows start with a fashion demonstration of models including supermodel Niki Taylor and fashion consultant Christiev Carothers. The demonstration is followed by a bluegrass group from Russia named Bering Strait that sings two songs with an interview in between with the host.

The fitness and self-defense instructor Bao is next. He demonstrates some of his moves with the host.

Then comes the Nashville group SHeDAISY, which sings a couple of songs and is interviewed by the host.

The day closes with the camera panning the audience to be used later in editing.

And though the day is fast paced and at times intense, everyone seems to have a good time - even telling jokes during the temporary lull periods.

All of this activity is supported by an array of technical staff, editors, makeup artists, and executive staff. There are rooms for the stars, makeup sessions, operations and equipment. And there is even a room for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Of course, the events are catered.

Before the complex was purchased by United States Media Corp. and named NorthStar, it was owned by Quest Digital Media, an offshoot of Denver billionaire Phillip Anschutz's media empire.

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