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# Dropping of 'Law & Order' Leaves Hole in Economy

By **PATRICK MCGEEHAN** and **PATRICK HEALY**

In 20 years of production on the streets and soundstages of New York, "Law & Order" served as a springboard and a meal ticket for hundreds of actors. It did the same for the careers of other New Yorkers, like David Dreishpoon, the caterer.

Mr. Dreishpoon was struggling to make a living in the food service business when he borrowed \$5,000 from his grandmother and talked his way into a job feeding the cast and crew of "Law & Order."

The job lasted 14 years, and by the time he severed ties with the show six years ago, it had paid his company, [David's Gourmet Catering and Craft Service](#), about \$1.5 million and Mr. Dreishpoon was established as a nosh-maker to the stars.

"It was the best source of business I've ever had," Mr. Dreishpoon said Friday as he drove to a Hamptons location for another TV show.

"It just kept going and going and going," he said.

But the wheels of TV justice will soon grind to a halt, after [NBC](#) announced on Friday that it was canceling the original "Law & Order," leaving a big hole in the city's economy.

Katherine Oliver, the commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Film, Theater and Broadcasting, said that every year the show provided jobs to about 4,000 people, including one-day acting roles. Its spending totaled about \$79 million annually, she said, including things like coffee and bagels, boom microphones and duct tape. During its 20-year run, that impact amounted to as much as \$1 billion or more, she said.

Ms. Oliver praised [Dick Wolf](#), the show's producer, for choosing to film a series in the city when most other shows about New York were being shot in Canada or some other faraway place.

"He's really proved that New York City is an affordable place to shoot," she said.

Mr. Wolf also lobbied city officials to provide tax breaks to productions that do most of their work in the city. "Law & Order" was the model for that legislation, said Assemblyman [David I. Weprin](#), a Democrat from Queens who was a sponsor of the 2005 law when he was a city councilman.

The end of "Law & Order" is "disturbing," Mr. Weprin said.

"Hopefully," he said, "Dick Wolf will have something else waiting in the wings that we can use to promote New York."

The show's success rippled out from its home base at the [Silver Screen Studios at Chelsea Piers](#) on the West Side of Manhattan and trickled down to thousands of camera operators, costume designers, truck drivers and bartenders, as well as the hordes of hungry actors who came to New York chasing Broadway dreams.

The show's producers also patronized the city's hotels, restaurants, prop houses and department stores.

"We spent an enormous amount of money in Saks Fifth Avenue and Barneys, dressing the lawyers," said Leslie Yarmo, a

former costume designer for a spinoff, "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit."

Several casting directors for theater, film and television estimated on Friday that the majority of actors' résumés that came across their desks included "Law & Order" credits. Some actors who worked chiefly in New York theater, drawing weekly salaries of \$500 to \$1,500 for their stage roles, supplemented those paychecks by playing judges, jurors and police officers on "Law & Order." Pay for those jobs ranged from a few hundred dollars to \$1,000 or so a week for only a few moments of screen time.

Douglas Aibel, the artistic director of the Vineyard Theater, an Off Broadway theater, who is also a casting director for feature films, said the premiere of "Law & Order" in 1990 was a watershed for actors based on the East Coast.

"Many actors used to have to choose between pursuing a theatrical life in New York or going to L.A. to earn a living," Mr. Aibel said, "but one of the lovely things about the 'Law & Order' franchise is that it provided actors an opportunity to do both."

Jan Maxwell, a longtime New York theater actress who has been nominated for two Tony Awards this season, recalled fondly that she played murderers in her three appearances on "Law & Order" during the 1990s: one killed women with breast cancer, one killed her husband's lover and one was a judge who killed a woman who caught Ms. Maxwell's character taking kickbacks.

"The writing was decent enough so you didn't feel like shoving a knife into your head when you got home," Ms. Maxwell said. "And the money was helpful to have in between theater jobs. A lot of us counted on 'Law & Order': It was built on the back of theater actors in New York."

For lesser-known actors, the prestige of a "Law & Order" credit outweighed the earnings.

Frank Senger, who lives in Astoria, has played small roles (a biker, a strip-club bouncer) in two episodes of the original show, which is known in the trade as "the mother ship," as well as in two episodes of "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" and one of "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." He said he was paid union scale of about \$500 or \$600 for his work but had continued receiving royalty checks in dwindling amounts, some for as little as 33 cents.

All told, his earnings from those five appearances may have totaled \$20,000 or so, over 15 years, he said. "I know that doesn't seem like that much," he said. But he added, "You're taken as a serious working actor in New York if you've done 'Law & Order.'"

Artemis Anninos, who manages residential properties in Astoria, said that in 2005 she was stunned to see people tossing rocks toward a house she had rented for \$500 as a location for an episode of a defunct spinoff of "Law & Order."

"I said, 'Why are these people throwing rocks at my house?'" recalled Ms. Anninos, who said she had been assured that no heinous crime would be depicted there.

None was, she said, but she learned that the fictitious character occupying her house for the day was a child molester. Nevertheless, she added, "I would work with them again."