

Steve Mensch

President and General Manager of Studio Operations

Clearing paths for the creative minds at Tyler Perry Studios

By LaKeisha Fleming

“My career goal? Never hate my job,” shared Steve Mensch, President and General Manager of Studio Operations at Tyler Perry Studios (TPS). With an office in the aptly named ‘Dream Building’, Mensch humbly acknowledged how grateful he is to do what he loves, but it is readily obvious that his reputation as an industry visionary comes from more than a love of the job. That’s part of it, but what you’ll also get is a high-test formula of preparation, hard work, and unparalleled service to the studio and its clients.

In 2016, he began working for the history-making, first-of-its-kind studio on the East Coast: Tyler Perry Studios. As the President and General Manager of Studio Operations, Mensch found a dynamic leader in Tyler

Perry, a visionary who personifies determination. “This is a man who has ‘bet the farm’ to open a major motion picture studio,” Mensch said of his boss. “I emphasize ‘major motion picture studio,’ which places TPS in a unique position, there just aren’t any other studios anchored by a content creator in the way that we are; outside of California.” Mensch noted it would take more than four and a half years—yes, years—to watch all of the film and television content Tyler Perry has created. Mensch works to clear the path for the creative minds of Tyler Perry and his staff, allowing them to do what they do best. The studio makes full use of its new 330-acre location, twelve purpose built sound stages, 200 acres of green space, and historic district with 40 buildings on the national register of historic places that date back to 1880 from the decommissioned Fort McPherson U.S. Army military base.

“My office is in a 250,000 square foot building. Every inch of which is designed to be used for production.” But it does not stop there. TPS’ goal is to attract other producers, writers and directors to the creative potential and power that lives within Georgia. The studio allows other productions to rent space on their lot, the likes of BET, CBS, FOX, HBO, Lionsgate, Marvel/Disney, NBC Universal, OWN, Paramount, Warner Bros., have filmed projects at the studio. “My core responsibility is to ensure the facility is run in a manner that when clients select TPS, they receive a 5-star experience.” Mensch continued, “I want people to come here and if you need something, you get it, and in the rare case that we don’t have it... we’ll make it happen.”

TPS has exploded with growth since he took the helm, slating in over thirty unique projects, thanks in part to Mensch’s foresight. His wisdom is also one of the reasons why Georgia’s entertainment industry is on the map. Often referred to as the “Hollywood of the South,” Georgia has an incredibly bright future. “Our business currently is a 3-legged stool,” Mensch explained. “And that 3-legged stool is, a great incentive, our skilled work force, and our extensive infrastructure. Without those three, it falls over. Other states have tried to buy the business by creating an incentive and some with higher percentages than Georgia’s, but they didn’t have one or two of the other legs, and it couldn’t stand up.”

Mensch takes his responsibility in keeping the industry strong in Georgia seriously—and that includes helping future filmmakers. For those looking for positions and career beginnings in the industry, Mensch had some words of wisdom to offer up. “Like in my career,



when that bus comes by, don't be afraid to take the risk and jump on. Also, because most people are freelance in this business ... like any entrepreneur, you cannot be afraid of missing a meal," he said.

One glance back at Mensch's career trajectory and one thing is clear: his role at TPS is an achievement three decades in the making.

Born in New York, Mensch graduated from State University of New York at Buffalo. He worked a brief stint in sales before landing a position with Embassy Suites. "I chased Embassy Suites down. I was the only person to be hired into their management training program that didn't come out of Cornell Hotel Business School." He acknowledged the one trait that yielded him that victory. "It was persistence." Working in Embassy Suites' operations and sales was more than just a training ground for him; it provided the platform for his next career move.

While working at Embassy Suites, he was approached by the owner of Feature Systems Inc., a lighting and grip company. It was not a path Mensch had ever considered, and he had reservations about diving into the entertainment industry. But his client was confident in Mensch's ability to provide exemplary customer service. "That was a big leap," Mensch acknowledged. It was a leap, however, that taught Mensch a lesson that he continues to herald today. "When someone opens a door for you, walk through it," he stated simply.

Mensch did just that, learning and growing personally and professionally over the next 10 years. His next step moved him to Turner Broadcasting, where he became the Director

of Operations in 2005. The position allowed Mensch to make a lasting impact on the Georgia entertainment industry. "I became very involved in their government advisory team as the studio lead," he stated. "It was wonderful because Turner let me grow into a place to represent the company. I am epically proud of being the lead for Turner in giving testimony during the legislative discussions about the tax incentive."

The tax incentive allows studios to earn up to 30% tax credits on total production costs after spending at least \$500,000 on filming. It has been an incredibly successful initiative—in 2017, studios spent almost \$3 billion on more than 300 productions in Georgia. With an eye focused on future growth, Mensch proudly played a part in putting the measure in place.

His reputation for yielding results preceded him, and in 2014, the Dalian Wanda Company in Beijing China after an international search tapped him as the President and CEO for a \$2 billion studio in Qingdao China. "That was one bus that was never going to come by again, but also a scary one to get on." Mensch moved to China and jumped right in. "It was unbelievably character building," he noted with a smile.

At the forefront of many groundbreaking projects in TV/ Film production, Mensch has elevated his career to new heights. "I am very proud to be part of the leadership team at Tyler Perry studios, and I am looking forward to seeing exponential growth of the Tyler Perry brand," said Mensch. "Being part of what we are building here in Georgia, the legacy it will leave behind, and the lives it touches every day is the most rewarding work I've ever done."



TYLER PERRY STUDIOS

Situated on 330 acres of historic land on the decommissioned Fort McPherson Army base, Tyler Perry Studios is poised to become one of the largest motion picture studios in the U.S.

