

Real Steel



Follow in the footsteps of the actors in this action-packed movie tour. Visit the film location sites and explore the places where actors spent their downtime. Get the scoop and discover entertaining behind-the-scene stories and more.

A Steven Spielberg Dreamworks production starring Hugh Jackman, Dakota Goyo and Evangeline Lilly, *Real Steel* is an action packed, sci-fi movie. It's the year 2020 and the sport of human boxing has been replaced with robots.

Actor Hugh Jackman plays Charlie Kenton, a manager and ex-boxer down on his luck, finds himself in debt. Charlie soon discovers that he has an 11-year-old son, Max, played by Dakota Goyo.

With a storyline similar to *Rocky*, fans will get caught up in Charlie and Max's relationship. Director Shawn Levy, delivers a powerful message: Money is not as important as people.

The film was nominated for Best Visual Effects at the 84th Academy Awards.





GEIGLER FARM

1385 Pleasant Valley Road, Hartland

Although the movie is set in Texas, the Geigler Feed & Seed Farm is the opening scene in *Real Steel* and represents the San Leandro Fairgrounds in Texas. This is where the robot, Ambush, fights a live two-ton bull. The entire fairground was built from scratch on the local farmland. Movie fans will see a small town carnival in the background. Extras in the movie were treated to continuous ferris wheel rides with a birds-eye view from the top while scenes with the robot and bull fighting were shot and perfected over and over again.

INGHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE

341 South Jefferson Street, Mason

This courthouse became the Ingham County Texas Courthouse in *Real Steel*. In this courthouse scene Charlie learns that his ex-girlfriend has died and he attends a court hearing to decide the fate of his young son, Max.

DETROIT FIRE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS

250 West Larned Street, Detroit

This beautiful and historic building was used as Tallet's Gym, Charlie's old training gym, and the place where he works on his new robot, Noisy Boy. The "gym" set (boxing

ring and several large steel punching bags) was built on the main floor garage of the fire department building, \$180,000 was spent installing a hardwood floor over the concrete.

The historic building was built in 1929. At that time, the five-story building's first floor was home to fire equipment to cover the demand of the growing downtown Detroit area. Other floors of the building were used as living quarters for the firemen and offices for the fire department.

Interestingly, the old fire department headquarters has been sold to a developer who plans to turn the historic building into a boutique hotel. What a fun place that will be for an overnight stay in Detroit!



HIGHLAND PARK FORD PLANT

91 Manchester Avenue, Highland Park

This historic former Ford Factory was used as the boxing venue, Crash Palace, in *Real Steel*. In this scene, the robot, Noisy Boy, was sold to Charlie Kenton who took the robot to Crash Palace to fight. That was a big mistake on Charlie's part because Noisy Boy was pitted against Midas, one of the strongest robots there.

The director chose this historical Ford plant because he loved the architecture. No factory changed life in 20th century America as much as the Highland Park Ford Plant. It was here

where Henry Ford and his engineers perfected the process of modern mass production—the moving assembly line. How's that for putting Detroit on the world map?

PONTIAC SILVERDOME

1200 Featherstone Road, Pontiac

The Pontiac Silverdome was used as another boxing venue for robots, called Starblaze Arena. This is where Charlie first meets the impressive and imposing robot, Zeus. The former home of the the Detroit Lions, the arena held up to 80,000 spectators. In 2002, the football team moved to their new home, Ford Field, in downtown Detroit.

GROSSE ILE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

9601 Groh Road, Grosse Ile

This small town airport doubled as both a military airplane hangar and a western bar in the movie.

One of the few remaining structures of a once busy naval air station, built in 1929, the Grosse Ile Pilot House still provides the same services as it did when it was originally built. The pilot house was used as a dining area and barracks for flight school students. For *Real Steel*, the pilot house was also for overnight quarters by some of the crew, specifically the makeup crew.

More signs of the old naval air station is former Hangar 1, which now serves as Township Hall. Inside visitors will find a museum dedicated to the base and the people that served there.

President George H.W. Bush, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and game show host Bob Barker were stationed here at one time, when they were but mere "fly boys." After its closing, the base was turned into the Grosse Ile Airport.



NEMO'S SPORTS BAR

1384 Michigan Avenue, Detroit

It took the production crew a full day to film at this iconic sports bar in Detroit for one of the bar scenes in *Real Steel*.

Nemo's Bar is a landmark in Detroit going as far back as 1883. It is situated in the historic area of downtown known as "Corktown". If you want to be seen in Detroit, this is the place to go. Step in, have a beer—just as the actors did in *Real Steel*.

What made the filming here so unique is that not much had to be done on the interior to change anything. The only thing crew did was to remove some photos. The production company loved the historic preservation inside Nemo's, especially the tin walls and ceiling.

PARKWAY MOTEL

16200 Dixie Highway, Holly

Film crews shot on location at the Parkway Motel for nine days. In the movie, this is where Max teaches Atom, his hefty robot, how to dance. The owner of this hotel apparently was a smart business man as he dickered with his contract that Dreamworks handed him until it could be mutually agreed upon.

Besides new carpeting, curtains, shrubbery and new paint, part of the agreement was that Parkway Motel would get a beautiful 6' x 25' brand new sign on its property—the same sign used in the movie. Talk about the art of the deal!

PHOTO: REN FARLEY, DETROIT1701.ORG



COMERICA PARK

2100 Woodward Avenue, Detroit

Catch a spectacular view of the Detroit skyline from Comerica Park, home of the Detroit Tigers. Fans flock to the park every summer to cheer on the Tigers.

The open-air ballpark has an incredible picnic area, one of the most progressive concession areas in the world, topped off with a carousel and ferris wheel for fans to ride. Enjoy America's famous past-time!

IMPRESSION 5 SCIENCE CENTER

200 Museum Drive, Lansing

Impression 5 Science Center is a dynamic, interactive space for families to challenge their understanding of science. Visitors can explore the wonder of kinetic energy in a hands-on exhibit that allows you to perfect your pitching form and blast targets with an air cannon! The Building Zone focuses on gravity and tension and how they affect a structure. Get ready to become an engineer—build towers and structures with real moving parts. Maybe build a robot like the 'bot Atom in *Real Steel*?



PHOTO: DETROIT1701.ORG

SHINOLA

485 West Milwaukee Street, Detroit

Shinola is an American company that makes high-end hand-crafted bicycles, watches and leather goods in a former auto factory. A state-of-the-art watch factory is inside the historic Argonaut building, a former General Motors design center. Shinola watches are hand-assembled, beautiful and built to last. Stop by their flagship store at 441 West Canfield Street where Shinola bicycles are assembled and sold...all made in America.



STATE CAPITOL TOURS

100 North Capitol Avenue, Lansing

Michigan state capitol, a National Historic Landmark, welcomes over 115,000 people every year—tourists, students and families that visit the capitol with a guide or independently.

At the capitol, visitors have an opportunity to watch the legislature meet for session, admire the nine acres of hand-painted decorative art, and learn about from Michigan's history. Nearby, in the Michigan Historical Center, check out the Battle Flag Collection where visitors can trace the history of these flags from the battlefield to the capitol.



PHOTO: CIRCLE MICHIGAN

UNCLE JOHN'S CIDER MILL

8614 North US-127, St. Johns

Just 30 minutes north of Lansing, head to a family favorite, Uncle John's Cider Mill. Throughout summer and fall, enjoy all kinds of fun-filled festivities like mining for gemstones, hay rides, trains and more. Be sure to stop at their cider press, pick up some fresh cider and donuts and pick your own pumpkin in the fall. There's even hard cider for the grown-ups.



PHOTO: CIRCLE MICHIGAN

MICHIGAN'S LITTLE BAVARIA

Frankenmuth

Frankenmuth is home to the world's largest Christmas store, Bronner's Christmas Wonderland. But that's not all. This beautiful city has something for the entire family. Try zip lining at the new adventure park, enjoy aquatic fun at the indoor Zhender's Splash Village, cruise in style on the Bavarian Belle Riverboat, and treat your family to the world famous chicken dinners at the Bavarian Inn.

Shopping in Frankenmuth is like traveling to Europe without leaving the U.S. From cuckoo clocks to woolen mills, to specialty shops and boutiques at River Place, Frankenmuth is a shopping experience like no other.

DID YOU KNOW?

The film is based on “Steel,” a 1956 short story by *I Am Legend* (2007) author Richard Matheson. It was also made into an episode of “The Twilight Zone” called “Steel” (1963).

While in Detroit, Hugh Jackman was spotted in the Bacco Ristorante in Southfield. Said Hugh “Bacco, I just love that place. One of my favorite restaurants in the world!” What does he love about Detroit? “Here’s one of the things I love about Detroit: I landed and got to the house. One neighbor came over with cookies and my kids were hooked. The next neighbor, Steve, came across the street with a bottle of wine and two cigars from a country that you’re not supposed to have cigars from. We literally smoked them on the front lawn while drinking red wine, I was like, Yeah I could live here.”

Hugh Jackman overnighted in quaint Franklin Village while filming *Real Steel*. He was spotted at Knollwood Country Club in West Bloomfield Township and jogging around Franklin.

While filming at the Parkway Motel in Holly, the production company paid for the owner’s suite at a local Holiday Inn Express for nine days. Tenants that had been staying at the hotel also had to be put up at the same hotel.

Jackman’s entourage in Michigan included his wife, Debra, and their two children, Oscar and Ava. Attention fashionistas! Little Ava was seen in downtown Detroit wearing a Sanuk Lil Ibiza sandal, a Stella & Dot mini bloom flower necklace, and Stella & Dot mini soiree bracelets.

Large water trucks were used to spray down the sidewalk and front steps of the Cobo Center and streets outside of the Parkway Motel for scenes they were shooting. They wanted the street to look illuminated at night. Massive fans were used on the street to give the appearance of a wind storm; scenes shown in the movie had trees blowing but it was really all from those fans.

The very opening of the movie showcases scenes of Huron County and its graceful wind turbines and farmland. Huron County has the largest installed wind energy base in the Great Lakes region. The Thumb area is home to over 2,800 wind turbines

A Detroit casting company put out a notice to Michiganders that they were looking for people who owned military uniforms, from any branch, to act as extras in the film. All you had to do was take a picture of yourself dressed in uniform and submit it.

For the fight scenes, they used real boxers fighting in motion-capture suits. Then they inserted robot avatars set to the motion-capture work, all on set. Have I lost you yet? It’s a bit confusing, but it is the same technology they used in the movie *Avatar*.

Boxing scenes were actually actors on stilts. They had to have realistic boxing matches, so who better than boxing legend Sugar Ray Leonard as a consultant and instructor for the boxing scenes.

Twenty separate robots were built for the movie and designed around the actors boxing moves. The robots were programmed mechanically with joysticks and a command center operated their hydraulics, all stored on a computer chip that linked their operating system with another operating system of the person that is handling it.

To help prepare for the movie, many of the actors, and the even the director, watched the iconic films of *Raging Bull*, *Rocky*, *Champ*, *Paper Moon*, and even *E.T.*

The production team was strict when it came to any extras taking photos during filming. It was rumored that crew had to confiscate over 100 cell phones from extras caught sneaking photos of the filming.

Hugh Jackman actually gave away lottery tickets to fans. He would have up to a dozen lotto tickets, walk up to a group of fans and hand them out. How cool is that?

Dakota Goyo, the young boy that played the character of 11-year-old Max, had a stand-in at times. The stand-in however, was actually a young woman, in her late 20s, who had her hair cut just like Max’s. You would see her in obscure lighting or from the back or side view in a couple of scenes. If Dakota Goyo was unavailable for a particular scene, they would use the female stand-in.

Over and over again, the extras on the set and many fans exclaimed what a nice man Hugh Jackman was. Many times, the producers would have to pull Hugh Jackman into a black SUV and away from the crowds of fans that flocked nearby, hoping to catch a glimpse of the handsome actor.

Always willing to sign autographs for children, sometimes Hugh would sign their clothing. One time in particular, a large group of fans were standing across the street from the courthouse in Mason where they were about to begin filming. A young man with Down Syndrome caught the eye of Hugh Jackman. Mr. Jackman walked over to the young man, gave him his autograph and then spent several minutes speaking with him. Now that is a class act!

The production team looked at dozens of courthouses before they decided that the Ingham County courthouse in Mason looked the best. Local law enforcement and citizens were used as extras for the courthouse scenes. Some changes were made to the courthouse: they changed all the window blinds from metal to wood; painted the walls; and even reimbursed the surrounding local businesses for lost revenue they had during the three days of filming.

For sale on eBay (2016): Hugh Jackman’s robot truck from *Real Steel*. Big and bad, the 1960 International Harvester Sightliner is up for auction. It’s the rolling boxing robot repair shop from *Real Steel*. Due to the cost to build this vehicle (about a quarter of a million), only one was built for the movie and it was built as a full working set. This is a one-of-kind movie icon. So, if you have the cash...

Real Steel was the biggest studio picture the state has ever had and the biggest film director Shawn Levy had ever made. In fact, the movie grossed nearly \$300 million!

The robot Noisy Boy has LEDs on its fists that spell out, in Japanese characters, words like doom, pain, oblivion, the end, etc.

Each of the robots were built both in real life and as computerized technology. For certain shots with animatronics, they were controlled by more than 20 puppeteers.

In an apparent nod to the iconic boxing movie *Rocky* (1976), the world champion robot is named Zeus. In *Rocky*, the champion is named Apollo Creed. In Greek mythology, Apollo is the son of Zeus.

Director Shawn Levy chose to film the movie in Michigan because he was blown away by the Model T automobile plant in Highland Park. He felt it was the perfect place for the film’s first fight scene, which takes place at the Crash Palace. No other location he visited in New Mexico, Los Angeles, or Georgia even came close.

Two bulls were used for the fight scene with Ambush, but the better performer, Kujo, only had one horn. In that shot, a second horn was added with computer graphics.

The girls who ask to see Ambush and try to take a picture with it are Sophie and Tess Levy, the daughters of the director, director Shawn Levy.



The Michigan Film and Digital Media Office (MFDMO) was created in 1979 to assist and attract incoming production companies and to promote the growth of Michigan's indigenous industry. Since its inception, the MFDMO commissioner has been responsible for implementing a program that lives within the parameters of Michigan law and works to ensure the program runs efficiently and effectively. Today, the MFDMO is working diligently to guarantee the film and digital media program accomplishes key results of private investment and workforce development by encouraging high wages, high-tech jobs and talent retention.

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