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Georgia Southern's Armstrong Campus lights up the small screen on NBC's drama "Council of Dads"

March 24, 2020



"Council of Dads" co-executive producer and producing director Jonathan Brown on set in the Health Professions Academic Building on Georgia Southern's Armstrong Campus, which served as the major hospital location for the new NBC television series.

When location scouts for NBC's new television series "Council of Dads" combed Savannah for a realistic venue to shoot multiple hospital scenes, they knew they had found something special in the Health Professions Academic Building on Georgia Southern University's Armstrong Campus.

"I set up a visit, came and looked at it and I was floored," said "Council of Dads" location scout and Armstrong Campus alumnus Anthony Paderewski.

"I couldn't believe it. Basically, you have a back lot for a TV show here. It was absolutely perfect for what we were looking for. So that being said, I went and I talked to the producers and I got some pictures. When I showed the pictures everyone was blown away."

"Council of Dads," which premieres tonight at 10 p.m., is based on the book by Savannah native Bruce Feiler, and developed by

the creators of "Grey's Anatomy" Tony Phelan and Joan Rater, who also serve as executive producers on the series. The story follows Scott Perry, a father of five who, after receiving a cancer diagnosis, asks a group of friends to step in as father figures to his children in the event that he isn't around to see them grow up.

"It's an emotional family drama," explained "Council of Dads" co-executive producer and producing director Jonathan Brown. "The idea is to try and be as real as possible. And the show is telling the story of a family and what it means to be a family in this day and age. It's not just blood. The definition of family is growing, broadening with the types of relationships that are now included in a family. This is the story of one of those families that is made up of blood relationships, friendships, adoption and all those different kinds of things."

The show filmed almost entirely on location in the Savannah area for five months. Several of the scenes take place in a hospital, and the set has to be believable, multifaceted and offer the right aesthetic for television.

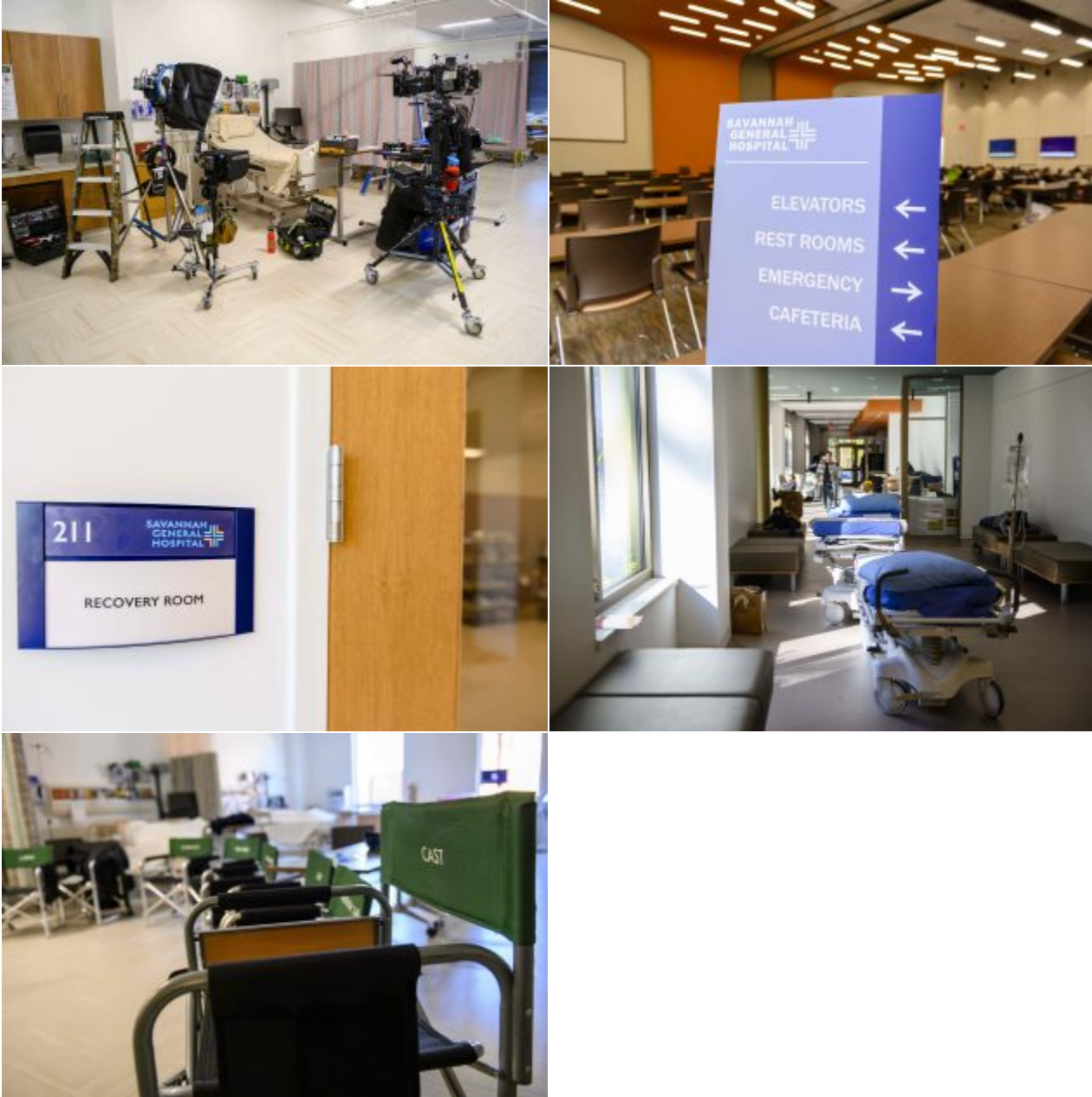
"We try to find locations that look authentic, and Georgia Southern, this facility, is essentially a real hospital," Brown said, sitting in the lobby of the Health Professions Academic Building. "Everything looks, and is, real."

"But because it's not in use on a daily basis as a working hospital, it's easier for Georgia Southern to let us film here. And it's easier for us to schedule it in our crazy schedule as we try to do all these different scenes all over town, plus work on stage. And it's beautiful and looks exactly like we want it to."

The 63,000 square-foot facility, designed to train future healthcare providers in a state-of-the-art interprofessional environment with a simulation suite and nursing and medical laboratory labs, became the major hospital location for "Council of Dads." For the better part of three weeks, the Academic Building transformed into the fictional hospital, "Savannah General," as scenes with two of the main characters, who are doctors, were filmed for the season premiere and two subsequent episodes.

As the liaison between the actors and the show's staff of writers, who are headquartered in Los Angeles, Brown is largely responsible for maintaining the tone and "visual vocabulary" of the show.

The hospital scenes, he said, were created with relative ease, given the pliability of Georgia Southern's Health Professions Academic Building.



“It allows us a lot of freedom in staging and writing to possible scenes,” noted Brown. “Freedom because of the size of it, because of how good it looks, because of the flexibility of the spaces. You know, if we need it to be an operating room or a delivery room or recovery room or exam room or an ER, for example. We’ve turned some of the bigger rooms into the corner of an ER. Plus, it has a beautiful nurses station. Georgia Southern’s facility gives us flexibility and allows us to write without feeling too restricted.”

Primarily, the true-to-life setting allows the University to provide exceptional education and training opportunities to help students succeed while addressing the healthcare needs of the region. The Waters College of Health Professions, housed in the Academic Building and Ashmore Hall, is the largest undergraduate health sciences college in the state of Georgia, and the University’s allied healthcare programs represent almost one-fifth of all undergraduate healthcare degrees earned in Georgia.

“The use of the Health Professions Academic Building is validation that we are training our students for real-world health care settings,” said Barry Joyner Ph.D.,

dean of the Waters College of Health Professions. “The goal for the building was to simulate a hospital setting, and we have accomplished that.”

Paderewski, who graduated from Armstrong State University in 2005 with a BA in Fine Arts with a focus in theater and performance, loved being able to return to campus and work with his alma mater.

“It was great to go back and see how the college has changed and what hasn’t changed,” he said. “Especially with it changing from Armstrong, yet it’s still Armstrong. It still has the Armstrong feel, yet it’s changed and it’s under a new umbrella, but it still feels like home to me.”

The “Council of Dads,” pilot will follow the season finale of “This is Us,” and by many accounts will pull on your heart strings.

“I saw the pilot,” noted Paderewski. “It’s quite amazing.”

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers 141 degree programs serving more than 26,000 students through nine colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities.

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