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SERVING THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1829

Stage set for city's movie industry

New production
studio planned for
Stillwater Avenue

By Richard Lee
STAFF WRITER

STAMFORD — A Stillwater Avenue building that houses a light manufacturing facility and warehouse operations is expected to soon be bustling with film crews after its purchase by the Connecticut

cut Film Center.

Headquartered in Stamford and with facilities in Norwalk, the film center plans to house its production and soundstage facilities at the 155,000-square-foot building at 300 Stillwater Ave. It purchased the building from Spinnaker Real Estate Partners and a Steven Wise Associates affiliate.

Located on 7 acres, the property will be the centerpiece of a \$20 million expansion of the center's Stamford

facilities, said Kevin Segalla, president of the film center. He credited the state's tax incentive program as an impetus for the purchase and a force driving Connecticut's burgeoning entertainment industry.

"Our new building represents the next phase for Connecticut Film Center and for the industry as a whole," Segalla said. "This acquisition and expansion is an expression of our confidence in the future of Connecticut's film,

television and digital media industry."

Construction should start within six months and be completed by the first half of 2010, he said, adding that marketing of the space is already under way.

Because of the tax incentive's popularity, Segalla said there is a need for suitable space, such as what he will be able to provide at the facility, where more than 300 people could be working at any one time.

"Governor (M. Jodi) Rell and the legislature deserve a lot of credit for implementing a forward-looking program that is creating jobs, building infrastructure and stimulating the economy at just the time we need it," he said. "Maintaining the program going forward will certainly be key to our success."

The project is an example of the benefits that the tax incentive program can produce, said state Sen. Andrew McDonald, D-Stamford.

"The television, film and digital media industry is among the fastest growing in our state, continuously generating revenue and jobs in an economic downturn," he said. "Stamford has seen firsthand the benefits of this incentive program, and CFC's purchase of this new facility will provide yet another source of jobs for our city, our state and our local businesses."

Segalla's project will bring long-term, permanent jobs to

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Stage set for film industry

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the city, McDonald said.

"They're investing in large capital improvements in the state. It seems like a great reuse of the property," he said.

David Martin, president of the Stamford Board of Representatives, welcomed news of the purchase.

"I think this is a very good development for Stamford. It provides an additional job base in these very difficult times," he said.

The building will serve as the future home of the Connecticut Film & Digital Media Center and will be upgraded to house digital-media-ready studios and production soundstages.

The facility will help CFC build on the growth the film, television and digital media industry has brought to Connecticut since the establishment of the state tax incentive program three years ago, Segalla said. Initial plans for the building call for 37,500 square feet of digital-media-ready production facilities and 45,000 square feet for television and film soundstages and production support facilities, including a mill shop, control room, dressing rooms, and prop and lighting facilities.

The center is in talks with several cable television and digital media companies to make the facility their permanent production facilities, Segalla said. The company also

owns and operates and Connecticut Film Center-Norwalk, a 122,000-square-foot soundstage facility in the SoNo section of Norwalk.

That facility has hosted production of several movies, including "Confessions of a Shopaholic" and "Old Dogs," starring John Travolta and Robin Williams.

Segalla has been a driving force in bringing the film industry to Connecticut, said Jack Condlin, president of the Stamford Chamber of Commerce, which has been a vocal supporter of the film tax credit.

"We're business supportive. My concern is if they withdraw the tax credit, it will have a negative impact on the film industry in Connecticut," said Condlin, who lives in the Shippan section of Stamford. He said five movies have been made in his neighborhood.

Segalla approached Spinnaker Real Estate Partners with a proposal to acquire the property, said Clay Fowler, principal in Spinnaker Real Estate Partners.

"I know him, and he's done well. He's been a force in the digital media and film industry," he said. "We remain part owners in the building with him."

The building is occupied by Gyrus ACMI Inc., a light manufacturing unit of the Olympus Co. BKM office furniture and World Wrestling Entertainment also use it as a

warehouse.

Gyrus ACMI has renewed its lease of 65,200 square feet, committing to remain for at least five more years.

Al Mirin, a senior vice president at CB Richard Ellis, said finding another suitable manufacturing site in Stamford would have been difficult.

"Most manufacturing space is being converted into something else. What Kevin is doing is manufacturing, but a different kind," he said. "The only commercial real estate sales we're seeing are owner occupied."

With the help of the film tax credit program, the county also recently saw the arrival of Blue Sky Studios in Greenwich, said Jim Fagan, senior managing director at Cushman & Wakefield. He said he expects the film center to expand.