



A rendition of the future NBC Sports offices at the former Clairol site in Stamford.

With NBC Sports, Stamford solidifies status as media hub

By Elizabeth Kim
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STAMFORD — Move over UBS and RBS.

There's a rival industry in town and it just got a lot bigger.

For many long-time observers, the official announcement on Tuesday that NBC Sports would be coming to Stamford represented the addition of not just another global company. More than that, the news cemented the city's reputation as a rising media capital.

Beginning in 2009, with NBC Universal's leasing of the Rich Forum theater in the city's downtown, Stamford

gathered steam as a "mini-media hub." Now, with NBC Sports signing a lease that will bring 450 employees to the former Clairol building on the city's East Side, some are pitching to make the tag bolder.

"We're no longer a 'mini-media hub,'" said Kevin Segalla, president of the Connecticut Film Center. "We're an honest to goodness cluster. We're an industry."

Segalla is one of the partners of the group — including Spinaker Real Estate Partners and Steven Wise Associates — which together own the 32-

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NBC Sports' move solidifies Stamford's reputation as a rising media capital

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site that will house NBC.

Over the years, he and others in the state have tried to woo film and television companies to Connecticut. The strategy was simple: exploit the city's proximity to New York City by dangling a generous tax incentive program.

Under the program, companies are eligible for a 30 percent tax credit on production and 20 percent credit on infrastructure.

"We thought it was only a matter of time," Segalla said. "It's no question that the tax credit program has served as the key catalyst for making this happen."

The city's roster of major media companies already includes A&E Television Networks, WWE, Inc. and YES Network. Of the three, WWE, the brain-

child of Vince and Linda McMahon, had been the largest employer in the industry. Its offices on East Main Street employ more than 500 people in departments such as marketing, publishing, television and web production.

NBC Sports will likely become the largest media operation in the city. In addition to the 450 employees that will work for NBC Sports, NBC Sports Digital and NBC Olympics, another 113 will come from Versus, the cable network NBC recently partnered with as part of Comcast's takeover earlier this year. The studio will also include space for the National Hockey League network.

NBC Sports has had offices in the city dating back to 1997, with about

100 employees in its digital division working in Landmark Square.

But the network's presence increased significantly with the arrival of NBC Universal in the summer of 2009.

Suddenly, there were throngs of people in the city's downtown waiting in line to see a taping of "The Jerry Springer Show," one of the three NBC talk shows produced there.

At the time, city officials were optimistic but refrained from recognizing a fully-fledged industry.

"There's definitely is a trend that is reinforcing itself," said Michael Freimuth, the city's economic development director at the time. "As industries become more concentrated, they grow at a more rapid rate. I'm not sure

we're there yet, but we're getting there."

If the city has indeed turned the corner, part of the credit goes to smaller media and production companies.

Lou Gorfain, the owner of New Screen Concepts, a company that makes documentaries and reality TV shows, has worked out of Park Place in downtown Stamford since 2004. That was the year his company made "Extreme Makeover," a series about real-life plastic surgeries.

Gorfain credited the program as being the first prime-time network entertainment show produced out of Connecticut.

"This was before tax incentives," he said.

The decision to move his company's offices from New York City to Stamford

came about as a compromise having to do with commutes. At the time, Gorfain lived in Westchester County, while his partner lived in Redding.

While far from being of the scope of New York City or Los Angeles, Gorfain said he has noticed an emerging network of media professionals with which to share information and resources. He pointed out that Triple Threat TV, a company which produces documentaries, is located across the hall from him.

In some ways, the city's smaller size may hold an advantage.

"It's a very collegial atmosphere in Stamford," Gorfain said. "Because it's a small town you cross paths more often."

With NBC Sports, the

small pond may have just landed its biggest fish yet.

Ronald Angelo, the deputy commissioner for the state Department of Economic and Community Development, described NBC Sports as "massive net exporters of goods and services."

"This is going to be a global hub for the Olympics and the NHL," he said, motioning to the empty warehouse.

And while Tuesday's press conference with Gov. Dannel Malloy focused on the 450 NBC Sports employees, Segalla said the average film and television production hires 150 vendors. That translates into employment for those working in sectors ranging from hotels and restaurants to construction and artwork, he said.