

## Dogstar to guide film industry to town

By John Kovach  
Editor

A one-stop hub for the entertainment industry is coming to Stratford.

Allen Christopher, managing member of DMG Studio Holdings LLC, announced Tuesday that Dogstar Studios would take over the former Exxon facility at 495 Lordship Blvd.

The 292,000-square-foot facility on 18.69 acres will be outfitted to accommodate a digital media and motion picture production space with 22,000 square feet of office space, 100,000 square feet for support services and an education component. It will have 12 sound stages ranging in area from 2,500 square feet to 16,800 square feet, some with 37-foot-high ceilings.

"We're ecstatic ... that we were able to secure Allen Christopher, et al, and these studios for the Town of Stratford, in that digital media is one of the fastest growing industries in the world today," said J. Bruce Alessie, special projects coordinator for Stratford.

While South Korea leads the world in digital media jobs, the U.S. is 17th, Alessie said.

"When you're talking the future of the industry, we're talking over 1,000 jobs that this will create, and with that we will become the digital

capital of the State of Connecticut."

"What's more impressive is the clients and tenants that will be housed in this site," Alessie said.

Christopher said he has letters of intent to lease space from some 30 companies, and promised announcements in the near future about businesses and productions.

Plans call for a facility with all of the support and studio functions needed for digital, television or movie production, from set construction to sound stages to editing rooms to food, all under one roof.

Doug McAward, who spent eight years as chairman of the Connecticut Film & Television Commission and is a producer, will serve as general manager of Dogstar.

"Dogstar Studios is perfectly positioned to become the premiere facility for the digital media and motion picture industry here in Connecticut," McAward said in a press release.

Vacated by Exxon some two years ago, the site can put on its new face without much work. Christopher said an environmental study shows little need for remediation, and producers plan to begin shooting there during the winter.

In vast halls under ceilings that meet the 30 feet of clearance sought for television and exceed that for movies, the building also can house anything needed to film in Connecticut. Set construction can be done in other spacious areas. Windowless offices can serve as editing rooms.

There's office space for administrative functions. A former laboratory will become a kitchen for a catering service that will deliver food not only inside the building but at location shoots currently served by New York-based caterers.

And, unlike New York City locations, the Lordship Boulevard site has secure parking, Christopher said.

Location made the former Exxon



facility attractive. Christopher said it's two tenths of a mile from Interstate 95; 59 miles from Columbus Circle in New York City; five minutes from Sikorsky Memorial Airport, and 16 minutes from Manhattan by helicop-

- see **Dogstar** on page 2A

ter, should shuttle service be restored.

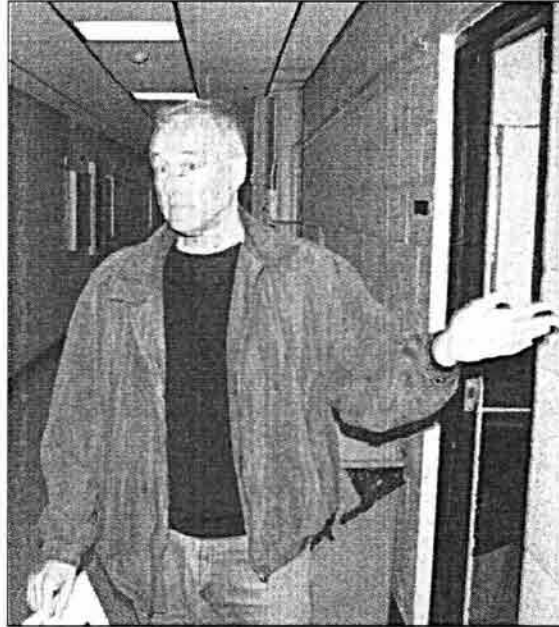
It appears Dogstar — named for Sirius, the brightest star in the sky — will be illuminated before Hollywood East, scheduled to be built in the former Army Engine Plant on the south end of Main Street. The closing of that transfer has yet to occur.

Christopher had been involved in the deal, but is no more. He said he has an attorney on retainer to take care of the situation and that a settlement had been reached, but he could not say more.

Area 51, which was to have been part of the Hollywood East development, will operate out of Dogstar.

Costs were not discussed, but Christopher said that without Connecticut's tax credits of 30% toward productions and 20% on infrastructure, "This project would not have seen light of day."

In a press release, commercial real estate agent Bruce Wettenstein, who represented DMG Studio Holdings, said "It is a great facility in an ideal location."



**Allen Christopher** of Dogstar Studios describes how windowless offices at the former ExxonMobil plant on Lordship Boulevard could someday serve as editing bays.

(Photo by John Kovach)