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## Movie studio to anchor GM redevelopment – now called Assembly

**ATL BUSINESS CHRONICLE** 



By Maria Saporta, Ellie Hensley and Douglas Sams Published in the Atlanta Business Chronicle on April 3, 2015

Metro Atlanta's newest movie studio will be the first major project at the site of the former GM plant in Doraville — a development that now has a new name — "Assembly."

The Integral Group, which acquired the GM site last year, is partnering with Capstone South Properties to develop "Third Rail Studios" on a six-acre section of the 165-acre development.

The first phase of Third Rail Studios will be in an existing 130,000-squarefoot building retrofitted into film and television production studios. It will include 60,000 square feet of sound stages and 20,000 square feet of production support mill shops, administrative offices and related vendor spaces.

When fully-built out, Third Rail Studios will be a 270,000-square-footfacility.

"It's something everybody can get excited about because it provides a big spark," said Eric Pinckney, Integral's project executive for Assembly.

The studios are expected to open for business by the end of the year, said Christopher Martorella, Integral's president of commercial real estate.

"It's something that can happen very quickly because there's an existing place that lends itself well to what we want to do," Martorella said.

He added that Integral was fortunate to have teamed up with Michael Hahn, the founder of Capstone South. Before becoming a venture partner with Integral, Hahn worked for the proposed Jacoby Development movie studio mixed-use project in Gwinnett County.

"We are confident we will have a tenant ready to go," said Hahn, who added he already has reached out to his contacts in the business. "I think we'll have someone notable as a tenant."

The film studio is the first major project to be announced for the Assembly development, which is being marketed and presented as several different neighborhood districts.

Despite the plethora of movie studios planned or open in Atlanta, there is pent-up demand for more film and television production facilities, said Egbert Perry, CEO of Integral. Having Third Rail Studios as part of the Assembly development will add a "sexy, funky, cool" flavor to that part of the GM site.

"Third Rail Studios" refers to the three rail lines that previously served the GM Doraville assembly plant, as well as the creative energy in the media production community.

The now unused rail lines will be preserved and integrated within the landscape, akin to New York City's Highline. The studios will anchor the "Yards District" portion of the site, billed as a one-of-a-kind destination for dining, entertainment, parks, art, retail, makers, and other businesses.

"We are still way below what is needed to support the industry as it exists today," Perry said of the new studio project. "It doesn't begin to address the existing demand, not to mention any growth in demand."

Lee Thomas, director of the Georgia Film Commission, confirmed Perry's statement. "Georgia's film industry is at an all-time high with 39 productions currently filming across the state, many of which are long-term tenants in our existing soundstages," Thomas said.

Third Rail Studios is just the latest in a number of new studio projects popping up in the metro Atlanta area. Eagle Rock Distributing Co., a large beverage distributor in Atlanta, opened two sound stage locations in Norcross and Stone Mountain within the past year.

Mailing Avenue Stageworks opened near Grant Park in 2012, and it the past month it opened a second location on the Westside.

Pinewood Studios in Fayette County also is expanding its operations.

A handful of other new studio projects are still in the planning stages. Tyler Perry Studios, now operating a 200,000-square-foot studio in Southwest Atlanta, is in talks to buy 330 acres of Fort McPherson for a new complex.

Shannon Mall in Union City, Ga., is being redeveloped into a 345,000square-foot studio by a firm called 404 Studio Partners, which is led by former Turner Entertainment Group and Universal Studio executives.

Atlanta developer Jim Jacoby plans to turn Norcross fiber optic plant OFS into an "Atlanta Media Complex" with seven sound stages and a film school, but recent reports indicate the project is facing a financing hurdle.

The future of the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center is unknown, but a couple of the bids that have been submitted call for the area to be developed into movie and television studios.

As a sign of the times, local developers are discovering that using film and television studios can be the spark for mixed-use development projects.

Previously, developers have followed the axiom that retail follows rooftops. More recently, some office developers began to say their prospects for landing office tenants were greater if their mixed-use projects included apartments and chef-driven restaurants. Avalon, the giant mixed-use project along Georgia 400 in Alpharetta, is one example.

But, activity in the state's film industry is compelling more developers to include studios as a catalyst.

"With this amount of business we are seeing an increased need for infrastructure and are thrilled to have additional dedicated soundstages to meet this demand and insure Georgia's continued success in the film business," Thomas said.

Assembly would continue a string of giant projects along the Atlanta Perimeter, from SunTrust Park and its mixed-use project in the Cumberland-Galleria area to the State Farm Insurance campus in Dunwoody. Mercedes-Benz is also building its headquarters in Sandy Springs.

Integral may get a boost because of Assembly's transit connectivity, a plus for a studio. The GM site will link to the Doraville MARTA station.

Hahn said the development will be unlike anything that has been done in Georgia.

"The site's transportation history and rail yards are symbolic, as Third Rail Studios and the Yards will continue to transport creativity and content to and from the region," Hahn said.

The design for Third Rail Studios is led by Janson Tsai, a division of the architectural design firm Perkins Eastman. Previous work includes design of Kaufman/Astoria Film Studios and Steiner Film Studios in New York, as well as projects with Imagine Films, CBS Television, NBC Universal, ESPN, Disney, and Sony — among others.

When looking to name the development, Perry acknowledged he did not love "Assembly." But the more he thought about it, he realized it worked on many different levels.

Historically, the site was an automobile assembly plant. But today the name works symbolically as "knitting" together the cities in DeKalb County and the region.

"We are creating an urban node in the heart of DeKalb County in a way that is not just an island unto itself but one that in fact connects to many other smaller urban nodes," Perry said. "That the intent. It has more multimodal attributes than probably any other site in the region... Assembly is truly a place where everything comes together. It actually is very much an appropriate name."





#### Maria Saporta

Maria Saporta, Editor, is a longtime Atlanta business, civic and urban affairs journalist with a deep knowledge of our city, our region and state. Since 2008, she has written a weekly column and news stories for the Atlanta Business Chronicle. Prior to that, she spent 27 years with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, becoming its business columnist in 1991. Maria received her Master's degree in urban studies from Georgia State and her Bachelor's degree in journalism from Boston University. Maria was born in Atlanta to European parents and has two young adult children.

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