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EUE/Screen Gems Studios breaks ground on new stage

By [Amy Hotz](#)
Staff Writer

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EUE/Screen Gems Studios officially broke ground Thursday on Stage 10, what will become the third largest movie sound stage in the world.

State and local government officials joined studio executives, members of the film council and others at the North 23rd Street film studios in Wilmington for the occasion. Because of inclement weather, a box of sand inside another sound stage stood-in for the studio's back lot. It was, perhaps, Stage 10's first involvement in movie magic.

"Now we can do the larger films and the economic benefits in Wilmington will be significant," said Chris Cooney, president of EUE/Screen Gems Ltd., which owns the studios in Wilmington and in New York.

Cooney said there had been occasions when filmmakers wanted to shoot in Wilmington but needed a stage larger than the 7,200 to 20,000 square foot facilities here.

Stage 10 will be 37,500 square feet in area and will have no columns to get in the way of camera operators. It will also house a 50 X 50 X 10.6-foot deep indoor water tank which can be used for underwater filming.

"This now puts us in a different market," said Johnny Griffin, director of the Wilmington Regional Film Commission. "It puts us in the market with Los Angeles, it puts us in the market with London."

Wilmington already has an estimated 2,000 experienced crew members, a diverse



STAFF PHOTO BY MIKE SPENCER

Left to right, EUE Screen Gems Ltd. President Christopher J. Cooney, Governor of North Carolina Mike Easley and EUE Screen Gems Studios Executive Vice President Bill Vassar celebrate after breaking ground for a new sound stage at EUE Screen Gems in Wilmington, N.C. Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008. When completed the sound stage will be the third largest film sound stage in the world. Staff Photo By Mike Spencer/STAR-NEWS

landscape and film equipment rental companies. North Carolina recently extended its 15 percent film incentives package to the year 2015. Griffin said when EUE/Screen Gems executive vice president Bill Vassar and North Carolina Film Commission director Aaron Syrett travel to Los Angeles to meet with filmmakers there, they received a lot of interest in the new sound stage. It was one more reason to film in Wilmington.

"The reason the company has been successful for 16 years is because it's been able to adapt," Vassar said.

Cooney described the move to build the stage now as "sneaking in under the wire while the global marketplace is being challenged."

He expects to be able to accommodate large films on Stage 10 by spring 2009.

Amy Hotz: 343-2099

amy.hotz@starnewsonline.com
