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BUSINESS ■ TV AND FILM

New studios to bring big productions, profits, tourism to south metro

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Atlanta Metro Studios is set to open its doors by May 25, according to co-founder Ed Richardson.

Richardson said the first phase of the project will boast 135,000 square feet of soundstages, 60,000 square feet of office space and 50,000 square feet of space for construction as needed.

It will be able to provide green screens for shooting outdoors.

"We're looking to host the largest productions in the world and show everything Georgia has to offer from exterior locations to, now, much more infrastructure," he said.

Richardson spoke as part of a panel discussion hosted by the Airport Area Chamber of Commerce last week at the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park.

The focus of the event was the expansion of the entertainment industry in the Atlanta area.

The studio will open on the former site of Shannon Mall in Union City.

Richardson said the city's existing infrastructure makes it an attractive spot for a studio.

However, the biggest draw, he said, is Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, which he said is only five minutes away.

"It is a huge, huge benefit," Richardson said.

"A lot of times, if you're filming a movie in Louisiana, you have to go through Atlanta to then go back to Louisiana. The fact that people can get here with one short flight from anywhere in the country, it's just a huge, huge benefit for us."

Lee Thomas, event host and deputy commissioner of film, music and digital entertainment for the Georgia department of

economic development, touted the rapidly increasing role of show business in the Georgia economy.

"The first 25 years of our film office, from 1973 to 1998, we did \$2.5 billion," she said. "Last year we did \$6 billion in one year."

One big reason for the expansion, she said, is the state's tax credit incentive.

Film companies can receive up to a 30 percent tax credit if they include a Georgia peach in their end credits.

If the company does not pay Georgia taxes, they can sell the tax credit to anybody who has income tax liability in the state.

Thomas said film production often translates into money for other local businesses, including food, lodging and construction.

But if Atlanta Metro and other new studios produce new classic films, she said, the south metro area may see a new source of income altogether – movie tourism.

POLITICS ■ ELECTION

Local candidates head for stretch in primary race

Compiled by **NOREEN COCHRAN**
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Decision time in the primary election comes to a halt Tuesday at 7 p.m. with many south Fulton offices at stake.

At the county level, Commissioner Emma Darnell is fighting off her second challenge for District 6 from former colleague William "Bill" Edwards.

Edwards, a 14-year south Fulton commissioner, lost to Darnell in 2014 when reapportionment put them in the same district.

As both are Democrats, the seat will likely be decided this Election Night instead of Nov. 8.

Independent and political body candidates have until July 1 to qualify for the general election, according to the Georgia secretary of state's office.

Commissioner Joan Garner is unopposed in District 4.

For south Fulton's District 3 and 4 school board seats, Gail Dean and Linda Bryant are running unopposed.

Nonpartisan races like the school board's will be decided during the primary.

No write-in candidates qualified by the March 25 deadline, according to the secretary of state's website.

For Fulton County sheriff, incumbent Ted Jackson is one of five Democratic candidates, including Charles Rambo, Richard Lankford, Tommy M. White and Walter M. Calloway.

Ben Cowart and Shurron Green are duking it out on the GOP ticket, ready to face the Democrat victor in November.

At the state level, most of the south Fulton delegation to the Senate and the House of Representatives signed up for re-election. District 65 State Rep. Sharon Beasley-Teague, D-Red Oak, has a challenger on the Democratic ticket in Sylvia Wayfer; the winner will face GOP candidate Gordon Rolle Jr. on Nov. 8.

In the primary, District 35 State Sen. Donzella James, D-Atlanta, faces Democratic

contender Tony Phillips.

Unopposed Democrats who have no Republican counterparts in the primary include District 39 State Sen. Vincent Fort, D-Atlanta, District 55 State Rep. Maria Metzger, D-Atlanta, and District 61 State Rep. Roger Bruce, D-Atlanta.

Unopposed Republican candidate District 16 State Sen. Marty Harbin, R-Tyrone, has no Democratic opposition in November.

Sailing through the primary will be District 38 State Sen. Horacena Tate, D-Atlanta, and District 60 State Rep. Keisha Waites, D-Atlanta.

They will be campaigning afterward, though, as District 38 State Senate candidate James "J.W." Morrow Jr. is on the Republican ticket, heading for a meetup with Tate on Nov. 8, and GOP candidate Ralph Nobles will challenge Waites for House 60.

Active campaign sites now are House districts 59, 62, 63 and 64, where incumbents are stepping down and hopefuls are stepping up.

District 59 contenders David Dreyer, Janine Brown and Josh Noblitt are vying to take over from Margaret Kaiser.

The District 62 race is a six-way Democratic battle between the unrelated Rafer Johnson and Aaron V. Johnson, Valerie Vie, William K. Boddie Jr., Joshua B. Butler IV and Larry Perkins Jr. to replace LaDawn Blackett Jones.

District 63 is also a one-party race between Debra Bazemore, Kelli Hooper, Kenneth Kincaid and Linda Pritchett for Ronnie Mabra's post. District 64 has attracted three Democrats – Derrick L. Jackson, Kathy Adams and Terry Williamson – for the seat held by Virgil Fludd.

If runoffs are needed, they will be on July 26. Early voting continues through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Information: (404) 730-7072 or www.fultonelections.com

GRADUATION ■ VALEDICTORIAN



In her consumer science classroom, Creekside High School valedictorian Abby Diallo handles groceries like the kind she used to create meals for the nonprofit Open Hand Atlanta. / Staff - Noreen Cochran

A NEW CHAPTER

Top senior at Creekside feeds her writing habit

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Creekside High School valedictorian Abibatou Diallo, 18, has chosen the furthest of the three schools to which she applied – Mercer University in Macon, Clark Atlanta University and Spelman College in Atlanta – at which to matriculate in the fall.

But the 90-minute journey pales next to the 5,000-mile voyage she made as a 5-year-old, when her parents brought her with them from the west African nation of Mali.

Diallo attended North Atlanta High School in Buckhead but left after a year when she, her younger siblings – now numbering five from newborn to age 17 – and her mother Mariam Dicko moved to Fairburn.

Leaving friends and arriving in 10th grade at a high school where the other students attended feeder schools together, Diallo – nicknamed Abby – hit the books.

"That's how I made friends because they thought that I was smart," she said. "They would ask me for help with their work."

"I'm a stickler for writing and I've read her writing - a lot of it - and I know she's going to do well [in college]."

— Karen A. Armstrong, Ed.D., Creekside teacher

Diallo helped others, too – her nonprofit work includes the Empty Stocking Fund, which gives sacks of toys to parents to wrap for their children, and Open Hand Atlanta, which provides meals to homebound consumers.

Her mother said volunteerism is a key portion of her daughter's development.

"Abby's experience with Open Hand helped her realize that everyone isn't as fortunate as she is," Dicko said. "When she came home, she kept talking about how volunteering

made her feel good about herself and that she wanted to do more volunteer work. I guess you can say that she realized that no matter how smart you are, it means nothing if you don't use your knowledge to help others."

Diallo is actually helping the school, Creekside Principal Ronald Maxwell said.

"When you have kids that want [success], you make sure you give them everything you can give them," he said. "They're moving in the right direction and we're moving along with them."

Besides her parents – dad Mamadou Diallo remains in Mali – the valedictorian has another adult on her side, Maxwell said – Karen A. Armstrong, Ed.D., who teaches Advanced Placement literature and composition.

"She's going to be a top student in college," Armstrong said. "I'm a stickler for writing and I've read her writing – a lot of it – and I know she's going to do well."

Prior academics – including a 4.0 average – won the future freshman a \$15,000 Mercer University scholarship.