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Supermarket of musician services rocks on in Fairfield

By **BRUCE HARING**

It's the type of place you might meet noise queen Wendy O. Williams, have lunch with Bill Cosby's manager, or listen while members of Dokken, a heavy metal band, rehearse.

It may be the only entertainment complex of its kind, a virtual supermarket for musicians. And it's named after an Italian vegetable.

The Broccoli Rabe Entertainment Complex in Fairfield was founded in 1983 with the idea of providing a central place for musicians' services. Three years later, the 40,000-square-foot cement building attracts many stars and apprentices to its industrial park location on Gloria Road.

Need to record your next album? Rehearse for the upcoming concert tour? It's all there. You can also have a gourmet meal, get your hair styled, have your modeling portfolio shot, or even take a music lesson.

"You never have to leave the building," said Brian Drago, one of the founders of the business. "It's one management under one roof with multi-income producing properties."

"What the music business is about is chemistry and contacts," Drago said. "Here the musicians are forced to bump into one another."

Drago, a former recording studio owner, started the facility with his friend Stephen Tarkanish, a musician. The two approached Drago's uncle and a friend for the financing to put the project together.

George Servente, a former partner in Hoboken's Clam Broth House, and Tony Drago agreed to back the construction, converting a cement building that formerly housed a computer design company and restaurant supply warehouse.

Several million dollars in improvements later, the Broccoli Rabe Entertainment Complex opened its doors on December 8, 1983. The complex is named for a much-hated vegetable that graced Brian Drago's childhood dinner table.

The two investors own the building and property and lease space to various businesses.



Stephen Tarkanish is cofounder of a complex where musicians can record an album or get their hair cut.

The complex houses the Steve Tarkanish Artist Rehearsal Studios (or S.T.A.R.S.), the Broccoli Rabe recording studio, the Orchard recording studio, sound and light production services, showers and a Jacuzzi, the Prime Time haircutters, Boobala's restaurant, and the Complex IV modeling agency. A nightclub will open soon.

Over 250 people are employed at the complex by Tarkanish's estimate, including studio musicians, technicians, recording engineers and service personnel. Each business is individually owned and operated.

Tarkanish declined to reveal the gross of each rented business, but said "Some are making money. Some aren't." Only one business, a talent booking agency, has left the building since it opened, he said.

Inside the main complex are photos of Julian Lennon, The Roches, Sting of the Police, and the Ramones. But they're not the only ones using the place.

"We have factory workers, executives from the surrounding offices come in and play the drums or piano," said Mitch Gerber, the complex day manager. "We're about 80 percent booked, but it's usually solid after 3, 4 in the afternoon," he said.

Music lessons with musicians who have backed such artists as Pete Townshend, The Jukes, and Renaissance are given through S.T.A.R.S. and attract students from age 16 to one corporate board chairman "in his eighties," said Gerber.