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Port of Davisville - Versatile port, research home, energy hub

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It's been a busy last month at the Quonset Business Park, with three exciting major new developments taking place. The Port of Davisville has been at the center of much of the latest high-profile news, including the arrival of a few significant ocean vessels. Its versatility as a port has been illuminated by recent events, and it is the crucial focus of a federal grant application.

The Quonset Development Corp. (QDC) recently garnered a letter of support from all four members of Rhode Island's congressional delegation to U.S. Dept. of Transportation secretary Raymond LaHood for a \$45 million grant request. The Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant would improve infrastructure at the business park, support wind energy development, pay for a crane for the Port of Davisville, and contribute to pier and road improvements.

"With one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, Rhode Island, more than almost any other state, needs federal assistance to build a green economy that will help create jobs now and in the future," the letter reads. "This proposal is an essential part of a coordinated effort in the state to help Rhode Island become a base for offshore wind energy development."

The improved infrastructure would help the state become a hub for regional manufacturing, staging and construction of wind energy projects carried out off the East coast.

The Port of Davisville is already very active, and expanding its capabilities every day. Recently, governor Donald Carcieri, senator Jack Reed and I broke ground on construction of a research and office center for the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) newest research vessel - Okeanos Explorer. Quonset will be the homeport for the 224-foot ship, its crew of 27, and 19 scientists.

The Okeanos Explorer, "America's Ship for Ocean Exploration," is a former Navy surveillance ship (USNS Capable) that was recently converted into a world-class tool for advanced scientific discovery. The ship is currently undergoing sea trials, and is expected to dock in Rhode Island in July 2010.

In making its decision to locate at Quonset, NOAA cited the proximity to the University of Rhode Island's world-class oceanographic program. NOAA's rear admiral Jonathan Bailey and Dr. Robert Ballard from the URI's Graduate School of Oceanography center for Ocean Exploration and Archeological Oceanography applauded the opportunity to share resources and research.

The versatility of the port was also recently highlighted with the arrival of another vessel, a 200-ton catamaran hull, which when completed will be the largest sailing catamaran in the world. The piece, manufactured at the Derektor shipyard in Connecticut, was loaded onto a large freighter docked at the Port of Davisville for shipment to Europe. It was loaded onto the MV Rickmers New Orleans along with 12 cargo containers using two of the ship's onboard cranes in a process that took several hours and a lot of skill. The 633-foot Rickmers New Orleans is equipped with four onboard cranes

with a lifting capacity of 640 metric tons.

Traveling around the world on the Rickmers are three passengers, including semi-retired couple John and Jean Locke, who are blogging about their trip. In a recent blog entry, they raved about Quonset and their shore leave visit into Rhode Island, said, "Port director Evan Matthews ... took us into the 300 year old village of Wickford, an absolutely beautiful and quaint little Rhode Island seaport village."

The diverse capabilities of the Quonset Business Park and the Port of Davisville continue to provide unique opportunities to the many individuals, businesses and transportation entities that come in contact with them. QDC continues work to upgrade the Park's infrastructure, and improve transportation capabilities, enhancing our goal to develop a hub for alternative energy manufacturing with vital green sector jobs.

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