



nerej

Long lines at lunch translate to success at Quonset Business Park

December 09, 2009 - Rhode Island

The free hot coffee and fresh produce served up at Quonset's Dave's Marketplace may not seem like a leading indicator of a successful transition from navy base to business park. But hang around for the packed lunch crowd and you'll find a diverse group of customers including welders from Electric Boat Corp., longshoremen from the Port of Davisville, high tech engineers from Hexagon Metrology and medical researchers from Unetixs. They are among the 8,842 workers employed by the Quonset Business Park's 168 companies and testament to the successful efforts over the last five years to advance the post military landscape of the 3,000+ acres that once housed two navy bases. Today, military personnel and civilians who worked and lived at the bases would hardly recognize the area.

Since 2005 the Quonset Development Corp. (QDC) has pursued an aggressive and successful effort to turn the area into a first -class thriving business park. Building on the area's natural attributes such as a port only 8 miles from the open ocean and a geographic location in the center of the northeast corridor, QDC implemented a multi-million dollar infrastructure improvement program. The work included upgrading or replacing the business park's aging network of internal rail. Roads have been repaired or rerouted and new ones constructed. With new direct highway access in place- the park now offers unparalleled intermodal transportation options for people and goods whether by ship, rail, road or air.

Along the coast, a \$6 million bulkhead replacement preserved valuable waterfront property and old building demolition freed up 140 acres of new developable property. With the exception of a few signature Quonset Huts, the old massive wood framed institutional buildings and military barracks are gone.

This demonstrated record of successful infrastructure investment coupled with a predictable development process has led to \$143 million in private investment and the addition of almost 2300 new jobs in the past five years alone. The numbers speak for themselves: 90 acres sold, 96 acres leased, 1.3 million s/f in new building construction. Of the 3,000 + acres, only 200 remain available for development.

In the last five years, our largest employers have continued to invest and grow. Among them:

- * Electric Boat Corp. shifted more of its manufacturing work to Quonset and invested over \$30 million in improvements to expand and create efficiencies in its submarine construction process.
- * North Atlantic Distribution, Inc. (NORAD) expanded its auto import processing facility, increasing its work force by over 15% and making Quonset's Port of Davisville the 5th largest auto importer in North America.
- * Toray Plastics America has its 70 acre corporate headquarters at the Quonset Business Park. The most advanced film facility of its kind in North America, it is increasing its production capabilities.

The last five years have brought in several new businesses. Among them:

* Unetixs Vascular Inc., a successful homegrown Rhode Island business specializing in state-of-the-art peripheral vascular testing equipment used for early detection in both strokes and heart attacks. Its new corporate headquarters also houses R&D, design, and a training facility for medical professionals.

* Goldline Controls and Falvey Cargo- two other new business park residents constructed their corporate headquarters with views of Narragansett Bay abutting what used to be the posh officers beach club and private beach. Now known as "Blue Beach" it's one of the many public access and recreation spots in the business park.

Then there's the new front door to the business park- the Quonset Gateway. Work on this 72 acre development, which will eventually house retail stores, a hotel, restaurants, and space for new office buildings, is well underway. In the last year, Kohl's department store and a Lowe's Home Improvement Store opened. Rhode Island's largest independent grocer Dave's Marketplace opened its doors in May of 2009. The Marketplace prides itself on providing a personal touch, like the free coffee, fresh produce and home cooked meals to go. There's always a line at lunch- confirmation, not only of Dave's good cooking, but also of the park's evolution and growth over the past five years.

Steven King, P.E. is the managing director of the Quonset Development Corp., North Kingstown.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540