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Many positive developments raise Warwick above state's unemployment levels and March floods

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We are all keenly aware of issues that have affected us as a nation and a global community, including the earthquake in Haiti, the economic crisis, the BP oil disaster, and political and religious conflicts, in recent months. To be sure, we have also faced our share of challenges as a state and community; high statewide unemployment and the historic March floods come immediately to mind. Nevertheless, there have also been many positive developments in Warwick, and I am pleased to share some of them with you in this mid-year report.

Residents and business owners continue to recover from the March floods. Our Department of Tourism, Culture and Development has been working diligently to help affected businesses relocate within the city, find temporary operating space, and apply for federal and state assistance. Many companies have shown remarkable resiliency, turning a catastrophic event into an opportunity to rebuild and upgrade technology and facilities better designed to meet their current needs.

A highly-anticipated public works project, the Warwick Intermodal Train Station, is slated for a September opening. Officially named Interlink, the facility boasts an enclosed moving skywalk that transports individuals directly from the airport to rail service, a commuter and rental car garage and bus hub, providing the closest air-rail link in the nation. Even more convenient access to T.F. Green Airport from the Rte. 128 corridor, less air and traffic pollution and increased economic development are among just some of the benefits we anticipate. We have already celebrated the grand opening of a hotel and tavern in the Warwick Station Redevelopment District, and another developer is constructing a 540,000 s/f, four building campus that will connect directly to the station.

Our hospitality community has also shown great progress in the first two quarters of 2010. Our occupancy has increase by over 12% from 2009 and continues to show promising room rates compared to the national figures. Warwick hosts the largest number of hotel rooms in the state and has likewise provided our visitors with hundreds of options for dining and exploring.

Several years ago, the city acquired 41 acres - a mile of unobstructed, spectacular shoreline - at the former Rocky Point Amusement Park. A recent agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, the court-appointed receiver for the remaining 83 acres, will allow pedestrians to use a road on SBA property to get to our land, thereby allowing us to open the park to the general public on a continual basis. Necessary security measures should be in place by early fall; in the meantime, various municipal departments continue to work cooperatively on plans for passive recreational opportunities along the waterfront.

I recently had the opportunity to join Steven Feinberg of the RI Film and TV office, and others on a tour of a Warwick facility where interior scenes of the new ABC series, "Body of Proof," will be shot. As construction crews worked feverishly to meet deadline - up to 80 local trades people are employed daily - officials explained that each episode shot in Rhode Island translates to a roughly

\$3 million boost to the statewide economy, and they are currently anticipating at least 20 episodes. Finally, I must commend our dedicated city employees, Warwick businesses, our active non-profit, civic, neighborhood and religious organizations, and numerous volunteers, who help to make our city the wonderful place that it is - and earn us a spot in MONEY Magazine's list of 100 Best Places to Live in America.

Scott Avdesian is the mayor of the City of Warwick, R.I.

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