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Freshly brewed construction projects percolating in Lewiston-Auburn market

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Lewiston-Auburn, Maine's diversified economy is evident in the range and scope of projects and business activities brewing in the area.

Bucking national trends, an independent family-owned pharmacy and medical products company is continuing to grow and thrive in the Lewiston-Auburn area. Bedard Health Care Group held a groundbreaking ceremony in Auburn last month to mark the launch of a 36,000 s/f pharmacy and "medical campus." The project, which will ultimately create 10 new jobs for the company, was made possible by a \$1.7 million SBA loan. Construction has begun, and developer Building Solutions Inc. anticipates the shell to be up by year's end.

Sand Castle Clinical and Educational Services recently celebrated the grand opening of its new 15,000 s/f education and clinical services facility at 72 Strawberry Ave. in Lewiston. The private nonprofit agency established in 1996 serves about 450 families a year and offers speech, occupational, and physical therapy and mental health services to individuals of all ages. The new facility includes four classrooms that serve a mix of special needs and typically developing students. While on the topic of educational facilities, Bates College just completed a new sports field using modern FieldTurf technology - artificial grass that is always green and easy to maintain. Bates is also in the process of renovating Hedge Hall and Roger Williams Hall into academic buildings.

Despite an economy that keeps nipping at our collective heels, some local businesses are poised for growth. Katahdin Studio Furniture, which has established a national reputation for making beautifully hand-crafted instrument/music stands, released a line of high-end furniture which it is marketing nationally. As a result, Katahdin has expanded its manufacturing facility footprint - and added jobs - at its Chestnut St. location in Lewiston. They also intend to open a retail showroom within the next few years, according to owner John Stass. The company has increased product lines and penetrated new markets largely via the internet.

Here's another modest but red-hot business that dared to open shop in this recession. Recently formed Micronetixx Communications, LLC, which specializes in engineering and developing digital television broadcast antennas, is optimistic about its future and is building up inventory. Micronetixx antennas are used with traditional TVs, mobile TVs, hand-held units, and forward link only applications (used in streaming news applications and cell phone programming).

The venture is being led by microwave technology specialist George Harris and long-time partner Peter Robicheau. Harris ran RF Technologies several years ago before the endeavor was purchased by The Ferrite Co., and ultimately was moved out of state. They recently moved back into the former RT Technologies building on 1 Gendron Dr. Micronetixx staff have decades of experience working closely with military contractors and personnel designing and building specialized high-power antennas, microwave transmission systems, and other apparatus. Besides cell and

broadcast towers, the company designs high-power electromagnetics applications for the defense industry, and other industrial and medical uses.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded a contract for construction of its previously announced veterans clinic to be located in Lewiston. CD Smith Construction Services will begin construction next spring on the 30,000 s/f clinic, to be located at 15 Challenger Dr. off Alfred Plourde Pkwy. near the Lewiston exit of the Maine Turnpike. The new community-based outpatient clinic is schedule to open in 2011.

Progress continues on construction of Baxter Brewing Co. Word from co-owner Luke Livingston is that a crew installed a grain silo in October, and earlier in September, an agreement was reached with various Maine distributors. Baxter is a Lewiston-based micro craft brewery which will be the first of its kind in Maine to produce all of its microbrews in cans. Located at the Bates Mill Complex, Baxter Brewing Co. will begin to distribute its craft beers state-wide late this year or by early 2011, and distribute wider across northern New England later next year. Plans include a retail store and regular tours of the brewery.

More restaurants continue to color Lewiston-Auburn's diverse mix of eateries. Pedro O'Hara's, located in the space formerly occupied by Espo's, offers a mix of Irish, Mexican, and American food in a casual atmosphere. The restaurant, located on Main St. in Lewiston near the Auburn line, includes a bar and banquet space for up to 100.

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