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Robust development predicted for Lewiston- Auburn; \$390 million of new investment

February 03, 2011 - Northern New England

Despite a cold and snowy winter, overall development activity in L-A is warming up. In fact, an overall tally of about 60 projects recently completed, proposed, or under construction in Lewiston-Auburn totals more than \$390 million of new investment.

Argo Marketing Group, working in conjunction with LAEGC, is putting the finishing touches on its new office space at the Business Service Center at 415 Lisbon St. Argo Marketing Group is a full-service direct response marketing firm, specializing in vendor management, product offer configuration, quality control, call center development, and campaign management. Argo is occupying about 5,000 s/f, or the entire second floor of the building, and is working with LAEGC to design what Argo CEO Jason Levesque calls "a state-of-the-art office space that will be a model of efficiency and will allow Argo Marketing Group to continue to set the standard nationally within its industry." Argo will hold an open house this month.

The Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport is working on plans to expand and renovate its terminal building to accommodate more aircraft, along with room for security screening for future passenger air service. The proposed plan calls for doubling the size of the facility to 7,000 s/f. The airport has been working diligently over the past two years to plan for passenger air service and court potential airlines.

Baxter Brewing Co. is planning an official grand opening event in early February at the Bates Mill Complex. The company recently canned its first batch of beer for sale, which will be available in select Maine stores and restaurants before a wider wholesale and retail effort in the future. The brewery offers daily tours and operates a gift shop. The company sells its product in cans, a trend in other parts of the country made popular because of the environmental movement, the portability of cans, and new technology that keeps beer tasting fresh and not "tinny."

An old project in Lewiston recently got a new breath of life. Developer George Schott is working with the City of Lewiston to resurrect Island Point, a promising package of real estate overlooking the Androscoggin River and the Great Falls and that once housed the Cowen and Libby Mills. The city and a previous developer once had dreams of building a hotel and mixed-use complex there. The Cowen Mill burned to the ground in 2009, and the project had stalled since. Last month, Lewiston City Councilors voted to sell the two former mill parcels to Schott in exchange for the developer building a \$1 million retaining wall and preparing the land for development. The city has the right to give the final nod to whatever business locates there to ensure the project adds tax value to the city.

At the recent Maine Real Estate and Development Association's Real Estate Forecast Conference in Portland, Chris Paszyc, a broker with CBRE|The Boulos Company, gave a rather upbeat 2011 forecast for the Lewiston-Auburn area. Most notably, he predicted the Auburn Mall would likely be sold by developer George Schott. (The 300,000 s/f mall had an initial asking price of \$32 million, though the Sun Journal newspaper quoted the price recently at \$27 million.) Situated on 37.5 acres, the mall has an 85% occupancy rate, is anchored by J.C. Penney, and has two new stores under construction that are unattached to the mall: a Goodwill store and Town Fair Tire.)

Paszyc said that even in this economy, L-A "never fails to surprise," and hailed as a positive development Schott's commitment to develop the aforementioned Island Point property. He also thought a proposed casino for Mill 5 of the Bates Mill Complex would spark development of nearby property.

In a Sun Journal interview following his presentation, Paszyc said "something sizable, of large scale, will happen" around the Lewiston exit 80 area of the Maine Turnpike. A nearby Challenger Dr. property last year was announced as the site of a new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic for military veterans.

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