



CELEBRATING
55 YEARS

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Cummings 2 million s/f Cummings Center celebrates 15 years

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This autumn marks a milestone for Cummings Center, the 2 million s/f office park built on the site of the former United Shoe Machinery Corporation (USMC) complex. Commercial real estate firm Cummings Properties purchased the site in April 1996, and opened its permanent leasing office at the renovated property that fall.

"The Shoe," as it was called by the generations of employees who worked there from 1899 to 1976, was once the largest concrete structure in the world. In its heyday, it employed a workforce of 5,000 and produced the machinery used to make shoes all over the world. Decline came only when the U.S. government, after 70 years of legal wrangling, declared the company a monopoly. The Shoe was broken up, and both the company and its building fell gradually into ruin.

Today, the revitalized site is the North Shore's largest office and technology park, housing more than 500 businesses of all types and sizes, several of them averaging more than 75,000 s/f. Even as Cummings Center built a road to the future, however, it became a keeper of the site's significant past. As the defacto Shoe museum, Cummings Center preserves artifacts of the region's early industrial age for the public to visit and enjoy.

Generations of residents either worked at The Shoe or had family members who did. According to Cummings Center general manager Steve Drohosky, dozens of visitors come to Cummings Center every week to locate photos of themselves or people they knew, to view artifacts displayed in dozens of cases and galleries around the campus, or to donate something of their own to the many collections.

Drohosky said, "From the beginning, it was important to Cummings Properties to preserve the great history of this site. We are delighted to make it available to the many people who come to remember or learn about The Shoe."

Beverly resident David Delorey, who was with USMC for 32 years, is considered the unofficial Shoe historian, and still makes himself available to visitors and students who wish to learn more about the site's past. The 71-year-old, who participates in USMC reunions held every three years, remembers well his former workplace, and appreciates its renovation.

Delorey said, "I walk the corridors and I know which departments were where and which machinery was where. It's definitely a treat to see it managed by Cummings. I'm impressed to no end with the maintenance of the entire facility"

Delorey encourages the public to come to Cummings Center to learn about an important piece of the region's history. He is quick to note the major economic and political ramifications of the site, first as USMC and again through its rebirth as Cummings Center.

"We would like even more people to come and visit. It is wonderful to see the past so lovingly preserved," said Delorey.

Among the many historical artifacts on display are mural photos of Shoe executives and employees, as well as workbenches, time clocks, and machinery of all sorts. The collection also includes:

- * fire hose on wheels from the building's own fire department;
- * the master time clock that controlled all of the employee time clocks in the building;
- * 1927 photo of the Quarter Century Club, made up of employees who worked for The Shoe since its founding; and
- * display cases containing lathes, drill presses, blueprints from the original structure, and security artifacts such as caps and documents.

With the arrival cool fall weather, many residents will find it delightful to follow the half-mile pathway around Upper Shoe Pond. This walkway, and its continuation south toward Elliott Street, has more than 20 historical markers mounted at convenient reading height.

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