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Positive developments bring hopeful signs of recovery

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As the country continues to climb its way out of a prolonged recession and communities struggle with the ripple effects of high unemployment rates, positive developments in Warwick in 2011 have brought hopeful signs of recovery.

As you know, the spring floods of 2010 wreaked havoc across the state, shuttering businesses and leaving homeowners with the daunting task of cleaning and rebuilding.

The Warwick Mall complex, which includes the mall itself and several stand-alone buildings, reopened with a fresh new look, refurbished stores and several new anchor stores to celebrate. In March, we celebrated the grand re-opening of a completely redesigned Macy's, touted as the chain's nationwide flagship store and with a reconstruction pricetag of \$3.4 million. A Red Robin Gourmet Burger Restaurant - the company's first R.I. location - opened on the property after an estimated \$700,000 construction, and July saw the opening of Fat Belly's Restaurant, marking the popular R.I. Irish pub chain's fifth location. Concerta Medical Center opened in another building in September, and within a week in December, we joined mall owners to celebrate both the opening of Jordan's Furniture and announcement of a Nordstrom's Rack - two retailers that are certain to bring new clientele to the mall and surrounding businesses. And all of these new stores, of course, mean new jobs, helping to put more Rhode Islanders back to work.

Priority Payment Systems, Astonish Results.com, Lazy Boy, and Agaves Mexican Grill are among other additions to our business community. Eastern Mountain Sports chose Warwick as its first R.I. location, and First Place Sports, a store owned and operated by husband-and-wife team Frank and Pam Silva, is enjoying its new location in busy Hoxsie Four Corners, after the closure of the interior of R.I. Mall displaced four companies. Just several yards up from First Place Sports is Hoxsie Plaza. The August sale of the plaza to a New York investor set a R.I. record for sale price per s/f of property, according to various real estate brokers.

With the InterLink train station now open near T.F. Green, the City Council has given approval to the Warwick Station Development District Master Plan, which will guide development of the area surrounding the InterLink. An update of the city's entire Comprehensive Plan is also underway. Residents and business people have been instrumental as we shape our vision of Warwick in the 21st Century.

Atrion, Healthtrax and the Integlia Company are among those businesses that saw expansion of existing operations here in our city. Numerous other small ventures also chose to call Warwick home in the past year. A mobile potato cart, operated by clients of the Trudeau Center, began operating this summer, providing jobs and attention to the non-profit organization.

In our Warwick Neck neighborhood, we celebrated the long-awaited opening of the shoreline at Rocky Point, and the Harbor Light Marina and Golf Course now offers the public a recreational and marine facility.

As we look forward to 2012, we anticipate a number of new developments. Be sure to check www.warwickri.gov or www.movetowarwickri.com for periodic updates on economic initiatives in Warwick.

On behalf of our Department of Tourism, Culture and Development, our Planning Department and the Mayor's Office, I wish you the best for a successful, happy and healthy New Year.

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick.

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