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Quonset and Davisville helping R.I. "make it happen"

November 08, 2012 - Rhode Island

Earlier this fall the Rhode Island Foundation brought together 300 individuals from our state's private sector for a two-day program called "Make It Happen RI." The event was designed to generate new ideas about how to stimulate the state's economy. The goal would be achieved by creating a critical mass of "key doers and thinkers - true diversity across sectors, industries, generations, and areas of expertise and experience - to identify short-term private sector actions to rekindle the economy."

The Make It Happen RI initiative and the subsequent report produced by the Rhode Island Foundation represent an important step in addressing a universal concern for all of us. Simply put, creating jobs is vital to the future growth of our state. With some 60,000 Rhode Islanders unemployed - the second highest unemployment rate in the country - the group focused on ways to create new jobs, and retain existing ones.

With 168 companies, 8,800 jobs on site, and the Port of Davisville now the 7th largest auto importer on the continent, the Quonset Development Corporation (QDC) works every day to move Rhode Island's economy forward. Despite the fact that our nation was undergoing one of its worst financial periods in its history, 2,700 of those jobs were created since 2005, so we were eager to be a part of the Rhode Island Foundation's initiative and offer our ideas on how to create a climate where more jobs can be created in our state.

At Quonset, our efforts to grow jobs has been made possible by two main driving forces. First, we have invested close to \$86 million in our top shelf infrastructure since 2005. Second, we are constantly seeking new ways to bring greater predictability to the planning of current and future tenants looking to grow here. The private sector has responded with investment of their own - \$297 million in private investment made at the Park since 2005. In addition, we are more than 95% finished with the recent \$22 million in TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant improvements at the Port of Davisville, and we recently embarked upon a \$7.5 million dredging project for the Davisville channel at no expense to taxpayers.

From a predictability standpoint, we can point to examples like the "Quonset Zone," which was recently recognized by Grow Smart RI with their "Outstanding Smart Growth Policies & Plans Award." This collaborative effort between the QDC and officials from the Town of North Kingstown, created a single zoning district designation assigned to the Quonset Business Park. Another key model is our Site Readiness program, which provides new businesses with permits and pre-engineered sites and was unveiled this Spring by Governor Chafee. Last month, its first participant opened its doors with the completion of the new Wide World of Indoor Sports facility. The pre-permitting program was also chosen as the key model for the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation's "Rhode Island - Ready" initiative, being developed by the RIEDC's Office of Regulatory Reform.

As some readers may know, the Rhode Island Foundation's follow up progress report to the Make It

Happen RI event keyed in on some of these efforts. Specifically, the report:

- * Praises Quonset as "an example of a business development scheme that works" and it applauds our pre-permitting program, "so you can hand a package to anyone who is thinking of locating there."
- * Emphasizes the importance of making it easier to register a business, and recommends looking at Quonset's 90-day site-readiness program to address regulation reform.
- * Suggests that all permitting and regulatory processes be improved across the state, and that successful efforts to do so should be celebrated. As an example, it points to the Quonset Business Park.
- * Calls for continued efforts to "improve infrastructure in our ports." At the Port of Davisville we're addressing this with the recent \$22.5 million in TIGER grant improvements and recently began a \$7.5 million dredging project.

Over the past 15 years, auto-import activity at the Port of Davisville has quadrupled and the Port now supports 1,105 direct and indirect induced jobs. With the completion of this year's dredging project and addition of a new mobile harbor crane, which allows us to become more active in the short-sea shipping business, we believe those numbers will continue to climb. And just as the idea of pre-permitting of more than 34 parcels has required an investment of QDC's time and resources, we know a streamlined permitting and regulatory process will bring more tenants and more jobs to the Quonset Business Park.

It is a testament to the investment we have made in our infrastructure and the proactive steps we have taken to provide more predictability for businesses that the Rhode Island Foundation and Make It Happen RI attendees recognized our approach as a good model for generating new jobs. We have been an engine of economic growth for Rhode Island in recent years and we embrace the opportunity to continue in that role.

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