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Danbury continues to lead Connecticut in economic development results

March 19, 2015 - Connecticut

The city of Danbury had another strong year in economic development in 2014. Overall, Danbury continues to lead the state of Connecticut in most vital economic statistics including unemployment rate, jobs created and retained, and retail sales tax revenue. Under the leadership of Mayor Mark Boughton, the city is pro-business and offers aggressive tax incentives and expedited permitting processes. Danbury also benefits from a AAA financial rating, low taxes, a good mix of retail, manufacturing and professional services, an excellent Chamber of Commerce, and proximity to New York City.

A number of ongoing Danbury capital projects were completed in 2014. The new \$150 million 300,000 s/f Western Connecticut Health Network (Danbury Hospital) patient tower (with expanded ER and critical care units, and additional medical-surgical patient care floors) opened in June. The project was one-third privately financed. The WCHN also completed its affiliation with Norwalk Hospital. The \$97 million, 12-story Western Connecticut State University Visual and Performing Arts Center (including a 350-seat concert hall, 350-seat theater, art gallery, recording studio and state-of-the-art rehearsal, classroom, and studio art facilities) opened in September. Belimo Aircontrol's new \$40 million 200,000 s/f U.S. headquarters opened in November. The company has long-term plans to double its 250-member workforce. The U.S. Army Reserve \$34 million weekend training facility (including a 95,000 s/f facility on 17 acres that will provide for 600-700 soldiers, employing 75 people) opened in April. The \$12.5 million Regional Hospice and Home Care of Western Connecticut building (a hospice and office facility, one of only two resident hospices in Connecticut) recently opened in January, creating 35 new jobs. Perosphere, a new pharmaceutical company opened a \$3 million 16,000 s/f R&D/manufacturing facility in October, also creating 35 new jobs. Ethan Allen completed a \$3 million refurbishment of its hotel in May, with 193 newly renovated guest rooms featuring Ethan Allen furniture.

There were also a number of important enterprise developments in 2014. Praxair, Danbury's only Fortune 500-headquartered company, announced plans in October to stay in the city and build a \$65 million 100,000 s/f global corporate headquarters. Cartus, the city's largest enterprise employer, also announced plans to stay another 15 years and invest \$15 million to upgrade its existing facility. Addivant, a specialty additives manufacturer, established its headquarters in the city in May.

Lenovo established a regional presence with a 10,000 s/f lease at Lee Farm Corporate Park. Other new leases and expansions at Lee Farm include Navigators Management, USA Energy and Concentrix. And last month, Sigmund Software announced its relocation from Brewster N.Y. to Lee Farm with a 10,000 s/f lease.

Matrix Corporate Center was also active. NewOak of New York City opened their new space at the Matrix in October. The company invested \$16 million, creating 100 new financial service jobs.

Notably, most of the jobs will be for younger employees. Macromark, a direct marketing company, also moved to the Matrix from Brewster N.Y., bringing 45 jobs, as did ECAC, a collegiate athletic conference.

Danbury continues to make progress in the revitalization of CityCenter, the downtown business district. Greystar, a national developer, began construction in October on its \$70 million 375-unit market-rate apartment complex in downtown Danbury. This cornerstone project will bring several hundred new residents to CityCenter and contribute significantly to additional investment in the area. The Danbury Innovation Center opened in May at the Danbury Library. Tenants include Danbury Hackerspace, SCORE of Western Connecticut and an internet café. It will foster entrepreneurship and corroboration, especially in the technology community.

In residential, Toll Brothers has completed 771 of a planned 1,377 condominium units in its 244 acre Rivington residential project in The Reserve, which was begun in 2007. Additionally, BLT completed 470 apartment units, and has plans for a potential 600,000 s/f commercial building, also in The Reserve. Several other projects are in various stages of development in the city.

In retail, Danbury Fair Mall and its tenants continue to do well, with sales per square foot among the highest in the nation for a covered mall. The 81,000 s/f Shops at Marcus Dairy, with anchor tenant Whole Foods, had a strong first year. The Danbury region contributes over 10% of state sales tax revenue annually.

In infrastructure, state road projects for major Danbury retail areas at I-84 Exit 6/North St. and Exit 8/Newtown Rd. will begin construction this year.

Finally, a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was developed for Western Connecticut and released in late 2013. The CEDS is an important step for the region, and for Danbury, in terms of future state and federal funding and development opportunities. The next step in the process is developing a website to more effectively market the region.

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