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Quonset: Committed to being good neighbors

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Quonset Business Park is a bustling place. With more than 10,000 jobs - nearly half in manufacturing - 200 companies and one of the top ten auto ports in North America there's a lot of activity here. Hundreds of trucks, cars, planes, trains, and ships are making their way in, out and through the park at all times of the year. And there will likely be more coming, as additional tenants enter the park and our current companies continue to grow - all creating more jobs.

In addition to all that growth, however, we still have neighborhoods on both the northern and southern boundaries of the park. And although the Quonset Development Corp. was created by the R.I. General Assembly to develop and manage the Quonset Business Park, we also recognize that are host community of North Kingstown and these neighborhoods are vital partners in our success.

For that reason, we are committed to being good neighbors and over the years we have found creative ways to allow the businesses at the Park to succeed, without disrupting the community. How? By placing several passive uses (no trucks, no lights, no noise, no emissions) in strategic spots to provide a buffer between the park and the neighborhoods.

One example of "buffering" is the Quonset Gateway District (QDC), which includes "light" uses like retail, a hotel, day care facility, office space and the Seabee Military Museum and park. The area not only provides a welcoming and attractive entrance to the park, but also gradually eases visitors into the more industrial businesses that exist deeper within the park.

The QDC has also built two new Gateway Office buildings in the area recently. This new project, which will likely include additional office buildings next to the existing structures, helps to ensure residents of the Newcomb Rd. neighborhood that there will not be an industrial facility across the street to them.

Another example of our buffering is the 2.3 mile long Quonset Bike Path, which runs alongside a 7 foot high berm covering more than six acres on our Newcomb Rd. property line. Opened in 2009, the trail, financed by QDC and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, runs along the perimeter of the Business Park from Post Road to the pristine Calf Pasture Point Nature Preserve and waterfront. The berm is home to wildflowers and other pleasing, colorful native plants that add another 6 feet of height.

New solar energy projects, like the Energy Development Partners project on Davisville Rd., and the Bella Energy project located off Camp Ave., also offer a quiet, minimal-use buffer to our neighbors. The QDC has also planted hundreds of tree and shrubs around and through the Park to help be a better neighbor. And starting last month, new recreational fields are being built on 22 acres in partnership with the Town of North Kingstown and Department of Environmental Management, another passive use for the areas closest to Quonset's neighbors.

We also worked to incorporate public access into the park to let our neighbors, the community, and other visitors know that the Business Park is an attractive and inviting place to be.

The bike path, our public beaches, and Calf Pasture Point represent an extraordinary opportunity along our property line for all Rhode Islanders to enjoy some of the most beautiful natural landscape of our state.

We recognize that the business park and its more than 200 tenant companies are crucial to economic development and job growth in North Kingstown and Rhode Island. Meanwhile, we are committed to going to great lengths to provide a buffer for our neighbors so they can continue to enjoy their homes in peace and quiet. We are glad that these 'best practices' which are part of our master plan strike just the right balance between job growth and being a good neighbor.

Steven King, PE, is the managing director of the Quonset Development Corp., North Kingstown.

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