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Rhode Island's only public port gets an upgrade - by Steven King

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Quonset Business Park is not only Rhode Island's leading engine of economic development and job creation, but is also home to one of the state's best kept secrets. Tucked away in the northern corner of the business park, the Port of Davisville processes international shipments of automobiles and other cargo on the shores of Narragansett Bay. Over the past 15 years, Davisville has rapidly grown into one of the top ten auto importers in North America and a gateway to markets throughout Southern New England.

Davisville had a record-breaking year for auto imports in 2018, receiving a total of 241,851 vehicles - breaking the previous record by more than 9%. The port, which has broken records in 7 of the last 8 years, is on pace to exceed that number in 2019. Quonset Development Corp. (QDC) works closely with North Atlantic Distribution, Inc. (NORAD) the auto importer whose workers process all the vehicles once they're unloaded from the ships. The close partnership between the QDC and the Port of Davisville with NORAD has ensured that the ports' growth continues. With import volumes expected to increase further in the coming years, along with the imminent growth of the offshore wind industry in Rhode Island, the leadership at QDC knew that it was time to update and enhance our infrastructure to handle the accelerated growth.

In 2016, the voters of Rhode Island approved a \$50 million bond measure to fund the rehabilitation of Pier 2, the workhorse of the Port of Davisville. Construction began on the renovation and expansion of Pier 2 in June 2018, and is expected to be completed in early 2020. Built in 1956 and designed to last 50 years, Pier 2 handles all of the incoming heavy cargo imports; automobiles, wind turbine components, electric transformers, and any sea shipments, as Rhode Island only public port. This rehabilitation project will extend the life of the Pier until 2072.

The steel structures around the edges of Pier 2 have been corroded from decades of contact with salt water from the Narragansett Bay, making the rehabilitation necessary. Improvements include the construction of new steel sheets, called an "HZ wall system," outbound of the existing steel sheets to provide a new bulkhead for the north, south and east faces of the pier, dredging the port to

accommodate large ships and extending Pier 2 by 232 feet to the north, allowing a third berthing space at the port for unloading cars and other cargo. At its completion, the expansion will put the port in position to continue breaking auto import records, while importing other goods simultaneously.

Dozens of construction workers currently on site are in the process of installing the steel HZ wall system along north and east end of the Pier, tying back those steel sheets using tie rods connected to a “dead-man” wall to ensure the strength of the structure, and driving piles into the Narragansett Bay to support the pier extension.

The renovations at Davisville have not slowed down activity at the port and the surrounding business park. Pier 2 continues to be operational throughout the renovation process, and the pier expansion is expected to be finished to accommodate ship calls while construction on the south side of Pier 2 is occurring.

Additionally, QDC has ensured that construction does not disrupt the operations of the surrounding businesses. Allen Harbor Oyster, a family-owned oyster farm whose 350,000 oysters in floating bags and cages are located adjacent to Pier 2, will be temporarily relocated as to not be affected by the construction activities.

Allen Harbor Oyster expects to have another successful harvest in their temporary location. QDC values businesses of all sizes, and works to ensure that growth in one sector does not hinder another.

Infrastructure has been key to QDC’s success over the years. The \$50 million investment made by Rhode Island taxpayers is a key to Quonset’s continued economic impact in Rhode Island. The Port of Davisville supports over 1,500 jobs, leading to over \$97 million in household earnings and accounts for \$333 million in business output. A renovated Pier 2 will open new doors to expand imports, ensuring that the automotive imports grow and position Rhode Island to be a hub for the future wind energy industry off our coast.

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