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Development projects proceed steadily in the twin cities of Lewiston-Auburn

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Be forewarned: this story contains no dire predictions, no double-digit declines, no negative implications for your 401(k) portfolio, no catastrophic market-wide ripple effect, no split-screen reports by screaming commentators, and no charts emblazoned with red arrows pointing downward. In fact, overall, this story contains some pretty good news.

In the twin cities of Lewiston and Auburn, a number of development projects are moving forward, or have been recently completed. Construction on the new \$13 million, 100-room Marriott Residence Inn continues at a fast pace, with construction anticipated to be complete this winter. The project is located in Auburn's bustling Turner St. and Mount Auburn Ave. area, where a new Famous Footwear and PetCo recently opened.

Also in Auburn, developer Joseph Casalinova is working on plans for a new business park not far from Exit 75 of the Maine Turnpike. Casalinova is seeking approval for the Kittyhawk Business Park, a 30-acre site off Kittyhawk Drive that will focus in part on attracting distribution and logistics clients. The park will capitalize on the area's nearby Foreign Trade Zone, U.S. Customs Port, and transportation amenities such as an airport, double-stack freight intermodal facility, and rail lines.

Two other Auburn projects in the pipeline are a 60,000 s/f distribution center on Logistics Dr. to accommodate a well-known agribusiness, and a new medical facility for St. Mary's Health System on Turner St.

In Lewiston, phase two of the Gendron Business Park received city approval this summer, clearing the way for an additional 134 acres of development by Gendron & Gendron. The new 11-lot subdivision near exit 80 of the Maine Turnpike is a joint venture between developer Gendron & Gendron and the city of Lewiston, and consists of a giant 65 acre lot to accommodate a large project, such as a distribution center.

Company officials and local leaders marked the opening of a nearly 80,000 s/f Fed-Ex distribution facility on Lewiston's River Rd. with a nice touch for attendees: a photo opportunity with the company's corporate NASCAR vehicle. Dozens of people attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

At the other end of the city, Mechanics Savings Bank continues to work on an expanded Main St. Lewiston branch which should be completed by year-end. The branch will be larger than the existing circa-1973 facility and will include an additional drive-up service window, a drive-up ATM, and a conference room.

Extensive work continues at the Bates Mill Complex, this time on the Canal St. entrance, considered the most well-known profile of the sprawling complex whose famous clock tower is a local landmark. The executive office building was torn down to open up the front entranceway for work on a grand entryway with a staircase that will lead to other parts of the mill and will spill out onto the courtyard. Meanwhile, space is ready for tenant occupancy in Mill 6 and in the Mill 2 wing and storehouse.

Lewiston mayor Larry Gilbert, Auburn mayor John Jenkins, and other local business and community leaders witnessed a ribbon-cutting ceremony to welcome Merrill Lynch, the newest tenant in the Business Service Center in downtown Lewiston. Merrill Lynch is now housed in a new third-floor, 2,500 s/f office. A staff of seven employees is located there, with plans to grow the team to nine or more over the next few years.

Renovations to the historic Dominican Block building on Chestnut St. in Lewiston are nearly complete after an extensive multi-year facelift that included re-pointing bricks, making major interior renovations, overseeing roof work, and otherwise paying meticulous attention to historic details. Millions of dollars have been spent by a restoration specialist to ready the 20,000 s/f building, listed on the National Historic Register. Built by the Dominican Brothers in 1882, it originally housed elementary school classrooms on the second and third floors, retail space on the first floor, and a large community room on the fourth floor.

Lufthansa Airlines' historic aircraft foundation, Deutsche Lufthansa Berlin-Stiftung (DLBS), has purchased three Lockheed L-1649A "Super Star" aircraft and is overseeing restoration of one aircraft that will be fully operational. That work is being done at the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport, and a special hangar has been built to accommodate the work. The ribbon-cutting ceremony is slated for mid-November.

In the late 1950s, the Lockheed Constellation series pioneered long-range air travel. The technically superior model, the L-1649A "Super Star," opened new horizons in air travel with its unprecedented capability of flying more than 6,100 nautical miles. The "Super Star" marked the beginning of the non-stop transatlantic operation bringing Germany and the United States closer together. The project is anticipated to attract aviation enthusiasts and history buffs.

Lastly, stakeholders and community leaders met in late October to plan the future of the Great Falls Performing Arts Center in downtown Auburn. The city envisions the center as a performing arts venue and a resource to the public school arts program. The building currently houses Community Little Theatre.

Community Little Theatre and the city of Auburn jointly funded a study conducted by Taylor & Burns Architects to examine the facility, assess the potential for conversion into a more modern arts center (rather than a school auditorium), and make recommendations for future changes. A committee has spent the last several months evaluating the existing facility, programming potential spaces, and developing a proposed business plan for the facility. The plan will go before the city council in the coming weeks for further action.

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