



nerej

Economic development continues in Lewiston-Auburn

February 04, 2009 - Northern New England

Despite an economic slowdown that has gripped the country, a number of vibrant projects have been or will soon be completed in Lewiston-Auburn, Maine, including a new Marriott Residence Inn in Auburn, several distribution centers including one for Fed-Ex, a thriving restaurant scene that rivals most Maine communities in quality and variety, and a sizable state-of-the-art hangar to accommodate the restoration of a vintage 1950s-era Lockheed Super Constellation Starliner by Lufthansa Technik.

Over the past 30 years, L-A has steadily created a diversified economy, transitioning from textile and traditional manufacturing to robust sectors such as health care, high-precision manufacturing, distribution/logistics, financial services, and business services. The area's health care industry is among the largest in the state, as more people in L-A are employed in health care-related work than any other pursuit. The result of this diversification somewhat helps cushion L-A against the sharp blows of the painful recession the nation is experiencing.

A number of development projects are moving forward, or have been recently completed. Construction on the new \$13 million, 100-room Marriott Residence Inn was nearly complete at press time. The project is located in Auburn's bustling Turner Street and Mount Auburn Avenue area, where a new Famous Footwear and PetCo recently opened.

Also in Auburn, developer Joseph Casalinova has received approval for a new business park not far from Exit 75 of the Maine Turnpike, called the Kittyhawk Business Park. The park is a 30-acre site off Kittyhawk Dr. 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 last summer, clearing the way for an additional 134 acres of development by Gendron and Gendron. The new 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 recently marked the opening of a nearly 80,000 s/f Fed-Ex distribution facility on Lewiston's River Rd., while 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 area's four colleges have experienced robust growth as well. L-A College recently completed a new 14,000 s/f, \$2.5 million learning center called LearningWorks. (Another 8,000 s/f build-out on

the second floor is underway.) The facility houses College for ME Androscoggin, an effort to encourage Androscoggin County residents to pursue college degrees and lifelong learning opportunities.

Bates College recently opened a \$30 million dining hall focused on eco-friendly efficiency and design, as well as a new dorm and walking path. Andover College, the freshman among L-A institutions of higher learning, expanded across the street from its first Lisbon St. location to occupy a second campus building. Central Maine Community College completed a new residence hall for more than 150 students. The first on-campus housing project since 1975, the 27,000 s/f building on CMCC's campus houses a function room on the fourth floor overlooking Lake Auburn.

The list of additional projects is lengthy:

* Merrill Lynch is the newest tenant in the Business Service Center in downtown Lewiston. A staff of seven employees is located at the third-floor, 2,500 s/f office, with future plans to grow the team to nine or more.

* 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, and overseeing roof work. 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. 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.

* 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 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.

Paul Badeau is the marketing director of the Lewiston-Auburn Economic Growth Council, Auburn.