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New Haven County: Branford's 2009 State of the Town event

April 15, 2009 - Connecticut

Branford's 2009 State of the Town event featured well-known economist Don Klepper-Smith as keynote speaker. A highly respected expert on the state and national economy and chair of the Governor's Economic Advisory Council, Klepper-Smith, offered his perspectives on the current national and state economy views.

With an underlying message to remain confident, Klepper-Smith reported that Branford is a "well managed municipality" and is "well prepared to deal with the uncertainties of the recession." Klepper-Smith cited several factors contributing to the town's strong position, including a higher than average employment level, a recent bond upgrade to AAA, and growth in town revenues over the last five years that has comfortably outpaced inflation.

This praise did not come as a complete surprise, as they echoed the CT Department of Labor's September report in Economic Digest that the town is a "vital community with a strong economic base ... with substantial development in well-defined districts." It is the town's standard operating procedure to plan well and to be prepared as possible for both challenges and opportunities. Infrastructure projects currently underway include several road and transit projects.

Work is nearing completion with a series of intersection upgrades along Branford's town's Rte. 1 corridor, specifically at Cherry Hill Rd., Cedar St., and Mill Plain Rd. The results of each will have new turn lanes, sidewalks and improved signaling, improving access to many businesses located on this major commercial road. The work at Cedar St. is especially important as that intersection serves as one of the major gateways to town at I-95's exit 54.

Also, a major project is expected to begin as bids are opened in April and a contract is awarded for the replacement of the Amtrak Bridge over Rte. 1. The state has dedicated federal stimulus money to fund this \$75 million project that will add extra lanes, increase clearance under the bridge, and improve the westward traffic flow with better access to the businesses along Branford Hill.

At the same time, federal stimulus funds will also be applied to the expansion of Branford's commuter rail parking lot for an additional 300 vehicles. The Shore Line East provides commuter rail service to New Haven, as well as convenient connections to Metro North through Fairfield County and into Manhattan, along with Amtrak connections to Boston.

Along with these infrastructure projects, new businesses continue to arrive and existing ones expand. Construction of the new TD Bank office building on West Main is nearly completed with plans for a grand opening on April 25th. Meanwhile, the new Zane's Cycles facility on East Main will become the home to offices of newly-formed Sachem Bank and Trust, a shoreline lender that will focus on small business needs. Also, Boston based biotech Forma has taken up residence in part of the Neurogen facility on North East Industrial Rd.

And back at the Cedar St. Rte. 1 intersection, the Staples Plaza has been approved for major renovations. The building that used to hold Zane's, along with Coastal Spirits and other businesses,

will be expanded and renovated, adding more square footage for existing and new businesses. And at the BranHaven Plaza on West Main St., anchor tenant Kohl's is in the first phase of a major facelift - exterior and interior - adding to its appeal as a major retail draw along with neighboring The GAP, Radio Shack, Shoetique, and others.

And even though the economy has slowed, Branford's green and town center remain quintessentially New England serving as the town's hub economic, social, and civic activity. Name restaurants and "unique boutiques" continue to make Branford a destination. This is why it's seen as the perfect site for a new cinema "screening" room, a wine bar, and other specialized retail businesses.

With such a diverse economy, the town saw the benefits in joining both CURE, the state's association for life science businesses, and the New Haven Manufacturing Association. As the first municipality in the state to join either group, Branford is an active part of those specialized business networks, keeping town in touch with those major industry clusters and having access to the resources the organizations offer.

To see what Branford has to offer, view Branford's Community Video on its website at www.branford-ct.gov. And to learn more about Branford and the opportunities it may hold for you, visit the town's website at www.branford-ct.gov or e-mail us at info@branford-ct.gov.

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