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NOAA's Okeanos to make Quonset's Pier One home

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In a move that will build an oceanographic and scientific focus in southern Rhode Island, the Quonset Development Corp. (QDC) has approved a lease for research /office space, as well as docking space for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) vessel the Okeanos.

The 250-foot research vessel, with its crew of 24 and 19 scientists will be home ported at Quonset's Pier One, illustrating the Business Park's ability to accommodate a diverse array of ventures, and our role in propelling Rhode Island into a center for oceanographic studies.

The Okeanos Explorer, "America's Ship for Ocean Exploration," is a former Navy surveillance ship currently being converted into a world-class tool for advanced scientific discovery. Once complete, it will be moved to the south side of Pier One at the Port of Davisville.

QDC will be constructing an 8,500 s/f office building to lease to NOAA to provide office and research space for the Okeanos team and support staff.

In making its decision to locate at Quonset, NOAA cited the proximity to the top class Oceanographic Program at the University of Rhode Island. U.S. senator Jack Reed recognized the potential for the two programs to work together and complement each other and was instrumental in working with NOAA to locate the vessel in Rhode Island. Governor Donald Carcieri noting that the URI Graduate School of Oceanography is already know worldwide, also strongly pushed for the opportunity to host Okeanos.

For more than 30 years, the Graduate School of Oceanography has operated the 185-foot research vessel Endeavor owned by the National Science Foundation and based in Narragansett. Expeditions are conducted locally, in nearby Rhode Island waters, along the eastern and western North Atlantic seaboard, and as far off as the Galapagos Islands and the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

Overseen by the NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration, Okeanos will be mapping the physical, biological, chemical and archeological aspects of the ocean, as well as developing new systems for exploring it. In addition, NOAA hopes to use Okeanos as a venue for reaching out to the public about the value of ocean studies.

"All life on Earth relies on the ocean--an ocean that provides oxygen and regulates global temperature to make the Earth livable," said the NOAA website. "Other key ocean benefits include food, energy and transportation. Yet, the ocean is 95% unexplored, unknown and unseen by human eyes, and resource managers cannot manage what they do not know."

NOAA plans to equip Okeanos with the most technologically advanced systems developed by its Ocean Exploration program and Dr. Robert Ballard's Institute for Exploration, which will bring a new, deeper understanding to yet-unexplored areas and phenomena in the ocean.

We expect the Okeanos to arrive at Quonset in July of 2010. We are excited to be a part of this new initiative and to provide the home for one of the NOAA's key instruments.

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

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