

Friday, October 20, 2006

Riverview shows its green side

Business First of Buffalo - by [Jim Fink](#)

The easy thing for Tom Montante would have been to make the fledgling Riverview Commerce Park a basic, suburban office park.

He could have taken the prime 106 acres along River Road and loaded it up with cookie-cutter buildings and everyone would have praised the project. But he didn't.

"The last thing I wanted was another me-too suburban office park," Montante said.

In Riverview, Montante has been able to marry economic development needs with environmental concerns.

Of the park's 106 acres, Montante said he is leaving 75 acres in natural green space. That means the hickory and oak trees will remain as well the natural animal life like deer, fox and blue herons.

Riverview is going to be new chapter in Montante's legacy -- one that includes running Broad-Elm Tires and bringing a Federal Express warehouse with more than 600 workers to the Town of Tonawanda.

Montante said since he first announced his plans for Riverview and his intention to have more green space than cement he has been greeted by more than one raised eyebrow. To him, though, it was an obvious decision.

It made a lot of sense, especially given the park's surroundings, namely the nearby Niagara River and Isle View Park.

"There is a tendency to over-develop parks," Montante said. "I've seen a lot of people take some really nice property and mess it up."

This is not to say that Riverview will be entirely green. It won't.

Riverview is one of 10 industrial or office parks around the region that have a state-designated shovel-ready status. In an area where shovel-ready land is at a premium, that is an important designation.

It also helps that the park sits in the middle of a state-designated Empire Zone, which opens the door for a number of economic development incentives that can potentially save a company anywhere from 15 to 20 percent of its costs.

And, being a stone's throw away for the state Thruway, helps as well.

Montante is figuring that during the next five years, he will construct nine buildings in the park, totaling approximately 650,000 square feet and be home to anywhere between 1,200 and 1,500 workers.

The seeds are already being planted.

Montante said they will start work in the next few months on a 55,000-square-foot spec building in the park. The building can be expanded to 75,000 square feet. Plans for the building are being reviewed by Town of Tonawanda officials.

Also in the works are tentative plans for a 120,000-square-foot spec building.

Interest in the park is just building.

Montante confirmed a Canadian company is giving the park serious consideration for a major U.S. expansion. That could open the door for other companies to sign deals for office or commercial space in the park.

Montante isn't being altruistic with his plans. By his own admission, he has invested more than \$3.5 million in acquiring the land and making it shovel-ready but putting in roads, sewer and water lines.

Yes, he is looking for a return on his investment.

"I'll be the first to admit I have a vested interest in seeing Western New York's economy improve," Montante said. "Who wouldn't be proud to turn around and say because of what they built, 1,200 or 1,500 people have jobs?"

A new address

McGuire Development has taken another step forward with its aggressive approach in the local commercial real estate scene.

First, the company hired James Dentinger as its president and now, McGuire has recruited Vito Picone away from Hunt Commercial Real Estate.

Picone, earlier this month, joined McGuire as director of business development. He had been with Hunt for the last four years and before that with Patrick Development and Chubb Real Estate.

Picone, 45, said he made the switch from a commercial real estate broker to the development side because of the challenge.

"It gives me the chance to work with a client from start to finish," he said.

For Picone, that means not only find office or commercial space for his clients, but also walking them through the entire development process including site selection and building the project.

"Being able to do everything through one person will make the process that much easier," Picone said.

Leaving Hunt was a difficult decision, Picone said. It was not one he took lightly and one that caused him a few sleepless nights.

"It's always tough to leave any place and the close, working relationships you develop over time," Picone said. "But to grow is to change."

Growing, again

Look for more than just delivery trucks leaving the UPS operations along Bailey Avenue in Buffalo. Look for construction trucks to be on the scene.

Because of growing business demands, UPS is expanding the Bailey operations center by 7,300 square feet, giving them nearly 260,000 square feet in the city.

The new addition will free up space for more truck and trailer parking.

"We really needed to make room in that building," said Scott Woodley, UPS project engineer.

The Buffalo Planning Board has signed off on the project. Construction is expected to start in the next few weeks.