

Editorial

Years of work pays off with big economic development projects



Photos by Tom Rivers

Steve Hyde, president and CEO of the Genesee County Economic Development Center, faces a gauntlet of reporters following last week's announcement that a high-tech company would be the first tenant in the STAMP site in the Town of Alabama.

Editorial By Tom Rivers Posted 14 October 2015

Two big economic development projects are coming to the area, and those projects should have a ripple effect, leading to other support businesses and boosting the local economy with more spending money at local restaurants and businesses.

The projects were years in the making, and show the importance of vision and laying the groundwork.

In Orleans County, Pride Pak will build a 64,000-square-foot vegetable processing plant on Route 31A in Medina, across from the GCC campus. Pride Pak is from Canada, and the Medina site will be its first U.S.-based facility.

The Orleans Economic Development Agency has welcomed several Canadian companies to the community in recent years, with Brunner International and Hinspergers Poly Industries among the group that has tackled expansions in Medina.

Medina and other villages have the sewer and water infrastructure that are critical to attracting manufacturing and processing plants. But many villages don't have the open space for those sites. Medina village officials about 30 years ago, back when Marcia Tuohey was mayor, worked to develop a business park on Maple Ridge Road.

The site drew BMP and the former Trek. The Orleans EDA has worked in recent years to expand the business park, and those efforts are paying off with Pride Pak coming to town.

It can be a slow, expensive process, acquiring land, running infrastructure and access roads, mapping out wetlands, sometimes taking down decrepit buildings with asbestos, and trying to come out with the dollars to do it all.

The EDA deserves lots of praise for getting Pride Pak to the finish line and committing to Medina. The company has a site plan that is under review by the local Planning Boards. It expects to break ground next month and have the new building ready with 85 to 100 employees by next June.



Steve Karr (right), chief executive officer for Pride Pak Canada, last Tuesday meets village officials and others working on the company's new 64,000-square-foot vegetable processing facility. He is pictured with Mauro LoRusso, vice president of finance for Pride Pak (center);

Gabrielle Barone, vice president of business development for the Orleans Economic Development Agency (far left); and Marguerite Sherman, village trustee (second from left).

The EDA also has been working for several years to make other spots in Medina ready for businesses. The agency has about 300 acres that are “shovel ready” with the infrastructure in place.

Those efforts should pay dividends now that the first tenant has committed to the STAMP site just down the road in the Town of Alabama.

1366 Technologies Inc. of New Bedford, Mass., was joined by Gov. Andrew Cuomo last Wednesday at GCC in announcing an initial \$100 million manufacturing plant at STAMP, which is about 1 mile south of the Orleans County line.

The company has revolutionized manufacturing silicon carbon wafers – considered “the heart” of solar panels. It looked at 300 sites for its new factory.

1366 Technologies expects to expand and make a \$700 million investment in the area, starting with 600 full-time workers and growing to 1,000. The company will use about 100 acres of STAMP, a 1,250-acre site.

Genesee County Economic Development Center officials expect STAMP will draw more companies that that the first tenant is committed. The site will be a big user of the Medina sewer.

Steve Hyde, GCEDC chief executive officer and president, started working on STAMP a decade ago. Back then, the economic development focus was putting new business parks along the Thruway. Genesee County added sites in Batavia, Bergen and Pembroke.

Hyde started talking about a “mega-site” in the Town of Alabama. A lot of folks seemed skeptical. STAMP is about 10 times the size of a typical business park and it is located near a swamp with little infrastructure.

Hyde saw the example in Albany with the [Luther Forest Technology Campus](#), a mega site that has attracted global nanotech leaders, investing billions.

Alabama in rural Genesee County was remote, a “quiet site” like Luther Forest for the delicate manufacturing in nanotechnology. It also is a huge site. The high-tech companies, like 1366 Technologies, need a lot of room to grow. The Thruway business parks don’t have the land.

Hyde and Genesee County officials spent a decade building support for the project in the community, the region and state. New York committed \$33 million to bring the infrastructure to the site.

While working on STAMP, the Genesee EDC had major successes bringing two yogurt plants to Batavia, projects that helped the agency build credibility in the region and state, leading to more confidence in STAMP.

Steve Hyde and Jim Whipple, the leader of the Orleans EDA, often say, “Economic development isn’t a sprint, but a marathon.”



Gov. Andrew Cuomo urges communities to develop plans for shaping their future and be tenacious in implementing them.

Too even be in the economic development race, communities need to have an inventory of buildings and land that would be attractive to companies.

If they don't have the assets in place, they need to work on getting them there, and they could be in for years of effort with lots of upfront costs before they see a nickel of return.

With governments cash-strapped, many municipal leaders may be inclined to pull back of economic development. Who wants to spend \$50,000 cleaning up a brownfields site when there are so many other needs in the community? Who wants to build roads through farm fields, especially ones by a swamp?

Twenty years ago, when Vicki Pratt was leading the Orleans EDA, she pushed to create the Holley Business Park, putting together a game plan to extend the village's low-cost electricity, and water, sewer, and roads to the site. That Business Park emerged with efforts from the Village of Holley, Town of Murray and Orleans County. It was a farmfield. Now it's the home of Precision Packaging Products and other businesses.

Our communities should take stock of their assets for bringing in businesses, an honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.

There is still space at the Holley Business Park and lots of room for businesses in Medina. I worry about Albion. There is 6 acres available in the Albion Business Park by Butts Road. I don't see a lot of other options.

There is the Route 98 corridor from 31A to the village, but there isn't sewer for a manufacturer or processing plant. Albion officials should try to make that happen.

It makes sense because Albion has the capacity in its water and sewer plants to serve big users. Other communities don't have the water or sewer to serve a big user.

Albion has the resource, but it needs options with vacant land with existing sewer for someone to build a Pride Pak-type facility.

I'd also look at the Point Breeze area and what could be done to make that a bigger draw. For years I've heard people talk about the need for a big investment in sewer infrastructure in that area. With STAMP bringing hundreds of high-paying jobs, the Point and all of the Orleans County lakefront could be in demand if there was more infrastructure in place.

The governor, while speaking at GCC last week, praised the efforts to prepare STAMP for the next generation of high-tech companies. Those businesses will shape the region for years and decades to come.

The governor said communities that want to succeed need to be laying the groundwork now. It's a highly competitive environment as cities, regions and states vie to land manufacturers and businesses.

"The future isn't just going to happen," the governor said. "The future is what you make of it."