

Making a Comeback

City Cultivates Economic Connections

By Symone Salisbury

In less than a decade, Plymouth and Marshall County lost approximately 2,000 traditional manufacturing jobs. The city's relatively small total population of 10,000 made the downturn particularly challenging.

Plymouth, however, is fighting back.

Zentis North American Food Solutions, a German fruit processing company, will establish its first North American plant in Plymouth. It will occupy a facility that formerly housed fresh-cut produce supplier Ready Pac and create more than 150 jobs.

In addition, a new technology initiative encompasses industrial development and recreational opportunities.

David Miller is president of Plymouth-Marshall County Technology Squared, Inc.

"Economic development covers more than just building and attracting businesses," Miller stresses. "Companies like to grow and are attracted to communities that have a high quality of life. We're not forgetting about the companies that are already here. This (initiative) is really about doing things that will help existing companies grow, and we want to help people create new companies."

"We feel like this initiative (Technology Squared) is a far-reaching, comprehensive vision that is going to position our area for success for the next 20 to 40 years."

International import

Zentis' Plymouth operations span nearly 200,000 square feet. Working with the company to secure space was Jeff Counsell, senior vice president of Food Facilities Group, a division of CB Richard Ellis.

"What's important to note is that Plymouth was never formally available (as an option)," Counsell emphasizes. "It was almost concurrent with the closing of the Ready Pac facility (that) we were looking at the building with Zentis. It wasn't on the market when Zentis found out about it."

Two Chicago metro area sites were among others considered.

It took less than 60 days for Zentis to close on the property after becoming aware of its availability, which is virtually unheard of in commercial real estate. Remodeling is scheduled to conclude by the third quarter of this year.

Easing the transition was an existing relationship between Ready Pac and CB Richard Ellis. The latter has sold several of the former's facilities.

"The availability of the building was number one (in terms of factors attracting Zentis)," Counsell observes. "We were under enormous time pressure. When you look at special-purpose, refrigerated food plants at any given time, even in broadly defined areas, there are typically not very many plants available. Number two was the fact that there was a compatibility in terms of use."

In addition, its proximity to Dannon Yogurt — one of Zentis' largest customers — in Minster, Ohio was a draw. Dannon's manufacturing facility in Minster is its largest in the United States.

Blazing a trail

The recently completed Greenways Trail project, led by the Plymouth Parks and Recreation Department, begins northeast of the city by the Yellow River and continues southwest toward the downtown area.

A related downtown revitalization effort is the Southern Downtown Gateway Enhancement project. Extending the Greenways Trail along the south shore of the Yellow River and building a new

The Greenways Trail increases the Yellow River's prominence.



park are major components. The park will be constructed on a floodplain and replace a dilapidated riverside building the Plymouth Redevelopment Commission plans to buy and demolish on Michigan Street.

"The trail will continue along the south shore of the Yellow River around and underneath the railroad trestle that crosses the river (at which point a proposed canoe portage will be added to complement those on the river's north side)," notes Frank Filson, a member of the Plymouth Redevelopment Commission.

He adds, "There will be another trail – to connect the first phase that was built last year – that will connect the south gateway via this park we're trying to build."

In addition to nature appreciation, the project includes angled parking to improve pedestrian safety and aesthetic downtown redevelopment such as restoration of a historic bridge, additional city lighting and railing enhancements.

"We're looking forward to the opportunities to set some benchmarks in the south gateway," Filson states, "to give people ways to consider what's next in the future and send the message that Plymouth is here. It's a good opportunity for businesses."

Squaring things up

Technology is the proverbial common thread connecting four of Plymouth's current endeavors: a metroNet system, techFarm, techVillage and Community Resource Center. Together, they comprise the Plymouth-Marshall County Technology Squared initiative (T²).

"It's a complicated initiative that has a lot of branches to it," Miller comments, "and that's really by design. Let's set our goals high and then work toward them."

"The time has been right really for the last 10 years to be working on transitioning from a basic industrial economy into the types of jobs of the future," he asserts, "which all the experts say are technical related."

Modeled after St. Joseph County's Metronet system, the Marshall County version (MCmetroNet) involves high-speed, broadband infrastructure and links each element of T². "The idea of the metroNet is to bring competitive and affordable fiber-optic service to the business community," Miller relates. "From an economic development standpoint, we consider it the infrastructure that's required today for very heavy technology companies."

Van Vactor Development donated the land upon which the techFarm will be built, along U.S. 30. Adjacent to Plymouth's industrial park, the techFarm will house agricultural-related technology, a proposed research and development testing center, a manufacturing facility for medical diagnostic equipment and space for company expansions. Miller and his team were in the process of applying for certified technology park designation at the time this article was written.

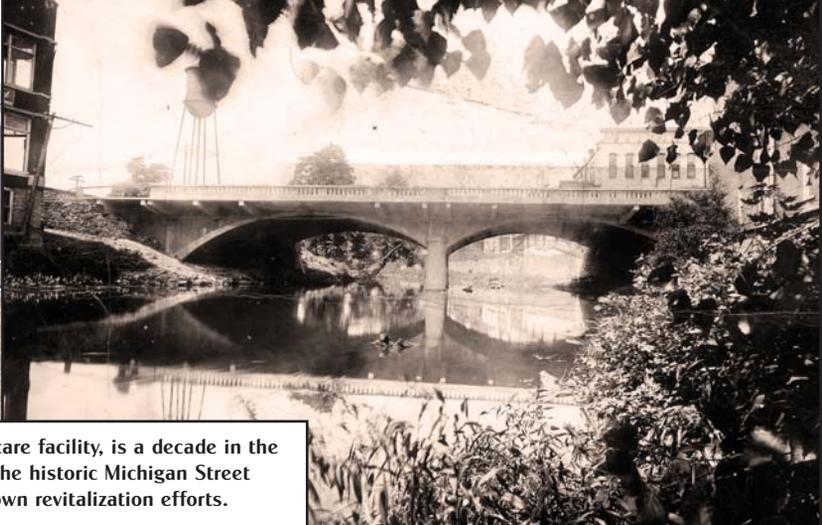
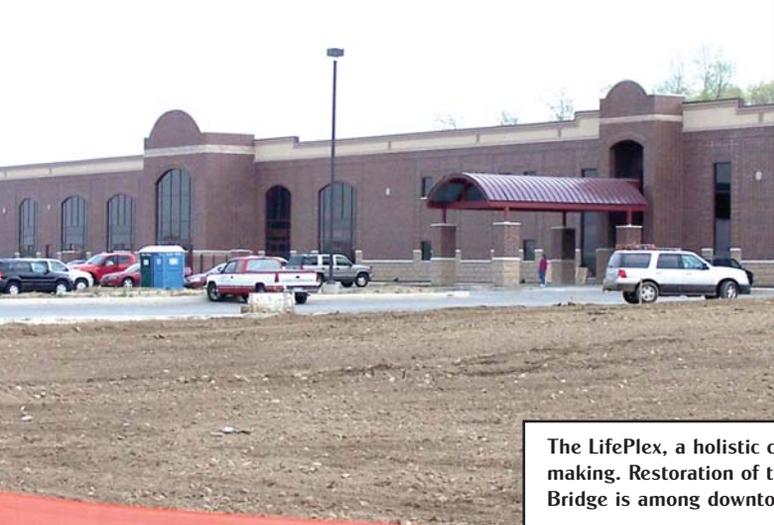
The techVillage will stand near downtown Plymouth and focus on urban redevelopment. "Buildings will be larger at the techFarm," Miller explains. "We foresee technical companies actually making a physical product, whereas at the techVillage, it might be more IT (and/or) software development related where it's more knowledge-based."

Many not-for-profit social service organizations will establish offices at the techVillage in the Community Resource Center. It will feature a local WorkOne Center, conference rooms, classrooms and more.

"By having the Community Resource Center, we think that will enhance the quality of life in the community," Miller declares. "Addressing that point at the techFarm, we already have built and opened a multi-million dollar health and fitness facility. The idea is that healthy employees make better employees."



Enhancing technology and quality of life are among goals of the Technology Squared Initiative, which will include the techFarm (top), techVillage (center) and Community Resource Center (bottom).



The LifePlex, a holistic care facility, is a decade in the making. Restoration of the historic Michigan Street Bridge is among downtown revitalization efforts.

Doctor's orders

Approximately one half of the LifePlex Health Management Center's 132,000 square feet centers on medical care, while the other half revolves around mental and physical wellness. Launched by Dr. Byron and Mary Holm, it is located at the techFarm.

Health care services include primary care; an urgent care center; orthopedics; cardiac rehabilitation; outpatient physical, occupational and speech therapy; diagnostic screenings; and leased office space. Among offerings at the wellness and fitness

center are a cardiovascular fitness area, racquetball courts, pools and an indoor track.

Membership in the wellness and fitness center is open to the general public.

Lean (manufacturing) machine

Dietra Rosenkoetter is senior account manager of the Purdue University Technical Assistance Program (TAP), which is the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Center for Indiana. She is working with several companies in Plymouth

Community Focus—Indiana's Leaders

Brent Martin: Architect at Center of Town's Expansion

Brent Martin, president of BA Martin Architects, is committed to enhancing Plymouth from a business and quality of life perspective. He's been contributing to its changing landscape – figuratively and literally – since the mid-1980s.

He considers "keeping your historic central business district a vital part of your economic base" to be the town's greatest area of improvement as well as architectural obstacle. "That is a tremendous challenge all communities face. Every decade you have to look at reinventing, how are you going to go forward?"

Martin offers a simple explanation regarding his passion for optimizing the town's opportunities. "To me, it's fun. I tell people, I'm paid to have fun."

BizVoice recently discussed with Martin his current projects (many are described in detail in the Community Focus story) and sought his insight on the city's initiatives.

Zentis

"I was personally involved because I sit on the Plymouth Industrial Development Board. We were touring that (Ready Pac) plant with the German company (Zentis) while production was still going on and winding down at Ready Pac. From the first time we met (with Zentis representatives) until a decision was made was maybe six weeks. That's unbelievable for what's going to be a \$50 million deal.

"I was involved in making sure Zentis got the information they needed (which involved answering questions concerning utility issues, permits and economic development incentives for renovation projects in the United States and specifically in Indiana), trying to expedite things to them as quickly as possible because their timeline was pretty short."

Southern Downtown Gateway Enhancement Project

"Our office is part of the design team for the South Gateway project. We will do a portion of the trail through the southern part of downtown. Two pieces will be linked by a new downtown park greenway trail in the 100-year floodplain. The first phase of the plan (Greenways Trail) is complete and heavily used."

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Brent Martin is a community fixture in Plymouth.

to establish a lean manufacturing network.

“They’re (manufacturers) all facing increased worldwide competition,” she shares. “They know they have to systematically eliminate waste from their processes and have to implement lean manufacturing principles. Many of them are doing this by attending workshops, hiring outside consultants and getting their employees trained. But the thing they’re missing is learning from one another, and that’s what this network is all about.”

One of the first steps in developing the network was forming an advisory committee, which held its first meeting in May. In addition, the MEP facilitates interactive meetings for area manufacturers that focus on a lean manufacturing concept. Examples include workplace organization and total productive maintenance.

State resources also are available, such as training grants offered by the Indiana Department of Workforce Development.

Rosenkoetter points out that many companies in Plymouth have implemented successful lean manufacturing techniques. Ideally, representatives from those organizations will share their strategy at the meetings or invite peers to tour their facilities.

“When we started working with Indiana companies in the

area of lean manufacturing implementation 10 years ago, we were working with all manufacturers,” Rosenkoetter recalls. “We’re seeing more non-manufacturing companies adopt lean principles, like logistics (for instance), and we know that the elimination of process waste will certainly have a positive impact on a company’s bottom line.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Jeff Counsell, Food Facilities Group, at (312) 861-7852 or jeff.counsell@cbre.com

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The City Center project involves converting a former downtown department store into an indoor mini-mall. Current tenants include a bookstore and deli.

Marshall County metroNet

“It involves dark fiber. The idea is that instead of having the choice of one company for high-speed data transmission, you can have 20 to 22 businesses competing for your business, which will help drive the cost of service down and make a semi-rural community like Plymouth more cost competitive with other communities. And if you’re going to try to attract technology-driven businesses, that’s an important component.”

techFarm

“I would call it more of a business park (compared to the techVillage). We’re in the final stages of approval for a (\$1.1 million) economic development administration grant, which will help fund improvements in the techFarm. We’re getting close to the gold. We’ve got some steps to go through, but we’re getting closer.”

techVillage

“The idea there is that you’ve got underutilized, poorly utilized property and to create a job generator base that is more information technology based in that redevelopment area. Part of the techVillage is the Community Resource Center, which involves co-locating approximately one dozen non-profit social service agencies to one location. They could share resources, be more effective in serving clients. Our intention (also) is to put the WorkOne Center in that building so it has a job training component to it.”

Martin’s architectural firm is playing a large role in the techFarm, techVillage and Community Resource Center initiatives. He is a member of the Plymouth-Marshall County Technology Squared Committee.

LifePlex Health Management Center

“We’re finishing the LifePlex project, located on U.S. 30.

That is the dream of Dr. Byron and Mary Holm. They had a practice in Plymouth (devastated by a fire in 1999) and since that time they’ve been working at temporary facilities and planning this LifePlex project.

“It’s an unbelievable partnership with Ancilla College. It is the home gymnasium for volleyball and basketball and training for Ancilla athletes. It is a full-service fitness center. St. Joseph Hospital is part of it with its physical therapy department and physician medical office building component. It’s a huge project and very exciting to be a part of.”

Fairfield Garden Court

“We are finishing construction. The Garden Court projects are for low-income senior citizens and give those seniors an alternative to either living in their homes – which is difficult for many of them especially as they age – or going to a nursing facility, which many of them don’t want to do.

“We will have our grand opening probably in July. That’s the sixth garden court program project in Plymouth; it has been around since the 1970s. One facility is designed for people with disabilities, but all of the remaining are targeted toward senior citizens.”