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Extended Canal St. offers new opportunities

Rebuilt street makes more Menomonee Valley land available for development

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The newly extended W. Canal St. opened Friday, bridging a transportation gap in the western portion of Milwaukee's Menomonee Valley - and setting the stage for further development there.

Advertisement Canal St., which used to run from the 6th Street Viaduct to N. 25th St., now goes all the way west to Miller Park's parking lots.

The new street will provide Brewers fans with another way to reach the stadium - just in time for Monday's opening day - and also will serve as an alternate route to portions of I-94 when that portion of the freeway is eventually reconstructed, said Mayor Tom Barrett.

More importantly, the extended Canal St. makes available land for development, including the city-owned Menomonee Valley Industrial Center, just east of Miller Park. That will bring more jobs to Milwaukee, Barrett said.

"It's about building hope. It's about investment in the city," said Barrett, before he and others cut a blue ribbon strung across Canal St.'s four lanes, a few blocks east of the 35th Street Viaduct.

The investment in Canal St., including the reconstruction of the existing street, totaled \$52 million - well above the original cost estimate of \$20 million. That estimate, created under the administration of former Mayor John O. Norquist, did not include several key components such as land acquisition, environmental cleanup and the costs of moving a railroad line out of the middle of the street, City Engineer Jeff Polenske said last fall.

The project's funding included \$35 million from city taxpayers and \$15 million in state money.

Work on new plant continues

Just south of where the new road's ribbon was cut, workers continue to build the future manufacturing plant, distribution center and offices for frozen pizza-maker Palermo Villa Inc. That building will open

in August and will house 270 employees, including 80 positions that will shift from northern Illinois to Milwaukee.

Just east of the Palermo Villa building is Falk Corp., which plans to add 90 jobs to its factory. Falk, which makes gear drives and other industrial power transmission equipment, has just over 600 employees at its plant, including 105 jobs shifted there over the past year from its former factory at 12201 W. Capitol Drive, Wauwatosa.

The Menomonee Valley Industrial Center, which last year sold 10 acres for the Palermo Villa project, also might draw BuySeasons Inc., an Internet-based costumes retailer that now operates in New Berlin.

Barrett said city officials are continuing to negotiate with a developer for the possible sale of land to accommodate a building for BuySeasons. The company is one of the nation's fastest growing privately owned businesses, according to Inc. magazine.

The BuySeasons relocation is opposed by Ald. Robert Donovan, whose district includes the city-owned business park. Donovan said BuySeasons would not bring family-supporting jobs to the valley, and he said he's been told that BuySeasons' seasonal employees are paid about \$6 an hour.

However, Rocky Marcoux, Barrett's development commissioner, said BuySeasons' seasonal employees, who work full time from two to six months, earn wages ranging from \$9 to \$16 an hour. Marcoux said BuySeasons expects to have just over 600 seasonal employees in 2007, when its new facility would open.

Also, Marcoux said, the company would employ about 90 full-time, year-round employees in 2007. By 2008, the number of full-time, year-round employees is expected to reach 126 and increase to 161 employees by 2009, according to the Department of City Development.

The BuySeasons proposal could soon come before the city Redevelopment Authority for consideration.

The authority, at a special meeting on Monday, will consider proposed guidelines for new development in the Menomonee Valley Industrial Center. Approval of those guidelines could set the stage for the eventual approval of a land sale for BuySeasons. That land sale also would require Common Council approval.

The 70-acre business park is being developed on a 134-acre former rail yard that the Redevelopment Authority acquired for \$6.8 million through a condemnation proceeding.

The city is using \$3 million in state and federal grants and \$16 million in city funds to conduct environmental cleanup and build the roads, sewer lines and other improvements needed to create the business park. Property taxes generated by new development are expected to pay back the \$16 million in city funds over 20 to 23 years. The city also is to raise money through land sales.

Other developments in the Menomonee Valley include Harley-Davidson Inc.'s museum, which is to open in 2008 at S. 5th, S. 6th and W. Canal streets.

Also, Proven Direct Inc., a direct-mail provider, plans to move from Menomonee Falls to a building that will be developed at the former Milwaukee Stockyards site, 1201 W. Canal St.

Both the Harley museum and stockyards site are in the valley's eastern portion, made accessible through

the Canal St. project and the \$50 million reconstruction of the 6th Street Viaduct, which opened in 2002.

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