



Q-C newcomers, veterans sink roots in industrial park

By Jennifer DeWitt | Sunday, March 30, 2008

When you're opening the only Hummer dealership within a couple hours of the Quad-Cities, a location at the crossroads of two major highways offers the regional exposure needed for a territory that covers eastern Iowa.

Or if farmers provide the company's livelihood — as they do at Swiss Valley Farms — positioning a new headquarters on the outskirts of the city and amid a few cornfields makes good

business sense.

Those were some of the factors that

D&D Hummer and Swiss Valley weighed when they decided to be among the initial tenants in the Iowa Research, Commerce & Technology Park. But the same remoteness that those businesses sought has proven to be an uphill challenge for the campus-like office park located in north Davenport.

"There's been the perception in Davenport that this is 'way out there,'" said Mike Giudici, the developer of the decade-old business park at the northwest intersection of Interstate 80 and

U.S. 61.

But that perception is fading as the park's real estate activity is on the upswing. Corrosion Fluid, a Michigan-based provider of pumps, valves, pipes and hosing for industrial uses, recently opened the doors of its new Quad-City facility there. In addition, Shared Solutions will break ground next month on a new building to house sister companies Shared IT Inc. and Shared Med IT LLC along with a third company, New Century Global Solutions.

"The goal was to make a park attractive to businesses that we hadn't been able to attract before," said Giudici, the majority owner of the now 120-acre park, which is bisected by the Davenport Municipal Airport. "We came close to landing a pacemaker manufacturer," he said, adding that the company chose to go to Ireland instead.

Giudici, a Quad-City cardiologist, said the growth of nearby community of Eldridge and the recognition that the site offers easy access to the rest of the Quad-Cities via Interstates 80 and 74, are helping the park "become much less out there."

Elmore, 53rd competition

Charlie Armstrong of NAI Ruhl & Ruhl Commercial Co., who is the brokering agent, said growth in the industrial park has been slow in recent years, in large part, due to the flat economy. "We don't have lots of new industrial growth in the Quad-Cities," he said.

When the project began in the 1990s, Brady Street — which also is U.S. 61 — had historically been Davenport's center of commerce and its main north-south thoroughfare, Giudici said. "But just as we were getting going, Elmore (Avenue) took off. And in the last 10 years there's been nothing but 53rd (Street), Elmore and Utica Ridge (Road). You can't have that many things going on at once."

But Giudici and Armstrong are optimistic about the park's future with the two new construction projects and some other prospects.

Most the sites range from three to seven acres in the 120-acre park, but there is a 25-acre tract available as well as a separate 100 acres, which is part of Phase II.

In addition to the airport, the park also is a neighbor of the Eastern Iowa Industrial Center, another industrial park which has seen several new tenants in the last couple of years.

"That is the busiest intersection in the Quad-Cities with 38,900 vehicles traveling by on I-80 each day and 36,000 on U.S. 61," Armstrong said.

Regional exposure

When Kirk Lindsly was awarded the Hummer franchise, he knew the dealership would need to locate somewhere that offered regional exposure. Unlike other automotive franchises where there may be multiple dealers in a metro area, D&D Hummer's closest competition is in Des Moines. D&D opened the signature dealership in 2004.

Lindsly, the dealership's president and owner, said he considered other Quad-City sites with similar exposure, but said the park's location won out because of the record traffic count and the type of traffic. Comparing it to a Web site, he said "It's not just the traffic count, it's the unique count. Like on a Web site, you have a certain amount of travel there each day with people going to work. But you also have the travelers that don't go by there everyday ... the unique travelers that go by."

He believes the site not only keeps D&D local for the Quad-Cities but helps customers from elsewhere in eastern Iowa, western Illinois and even Chicago easily find it — and sales are confirming that belief. "We are getting a draw from other areas and not just with the Hummer business, even with our used car business."

Traffic patterns told Lindsly that his clientele from Dubuque would have to come in from U.S. 61, while those in Iowa City/Cedar Rapids corridor would chose I-80. Lindsly said if D&D has a unique model out on the lot, it can stop traffic. "I hear frequently 'I was just driving by on 80 and happened to see you have a 'XYZ,' " he said.

Raised profile

Back in September 2003, Swiss Valley Farms became the second tenant at the park, opening its new headquarters right behind neighboring business Salzman International, a supplier of animal byproducts to the pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms.

Don Boelens, Swiss Valley's co-chief executive officer, said the company had outgrown the two small buildings it occupied in Mount Joy. But more importantly, Swiss Valley needed to raise its profile. Before the move, "People didn't realize that Swiss Valley was based in the Quad-Cities," he said.

Now the 35,000-square-foot building cannot be missed by travelers on I-80 and U.S. 61. "We literally didn't bring customers to the old facility," he said, recalling how his staff would meet potential clients in restaurants or at their businesses. "Now we have a place we're proud of, that's not over the edge."

Initially, Swiss Valley occupied the whole building, but later consolidated its corporate offices onto the first floor and part of the second. Other companies now sublease from Swiss Valley, which rents the building itself from property owner Modern Woodmen of America. Swiss Valley does own a lot to the immediate east.

Boelens said Swiss Valley had considered relocating to Dubuque, Iowa, which would have been closer to more of its dairy farmers. "But at the end of the day we decided the Quad-Cities was where we'd been, and where most of our corporate employees lived."

Professional atmosphere

Joe P. Andronaco, president of Corrosion Fluid Products, said his company also was looking to raise its profile when it chose the prime interstate location for a new facility. The company, based in Farmington Hills outside Detroit, has had a Moline operation for 13 years.

Corrosion Fluid Products' building, which was completed just a month ago, will house sales operations as well as inventory. The company provides pumps, valves and hosing for chemical and processing industries.

"We wanted to bring our Davenport building up to the standard of all our other buildings," Andronaco said.

He said they chose the park "because we were looking for a professional look to our operation." The highway access also was a plus.

"What we were looking for was a growing area that had potential for industrial growth and I don't know if we had

many to choose from out there," he said.

The company employs six people in the Quad-Cities, which could double in the next two years.

For Kevin Stutting, president of Shared IT Inc. and Shared Med IT LLC, and Shirish Tangirala, the owner of New Century Global Solutions, their new building cannot go up fast enough. The two have formed Shared Solutions, which will own the two-story building.

"We're both running out of space. We just don't have any more area to sit," Stutting said. "It is getting to be a problem."

They were drawn to the Iowa Research, Commerce & Technology Park because of their technical needs and with fiber optic running through the business park, it was a decision-maker, he said. Shared IT does technology infrastructure, networking and PC for the healthcare industry and others. Shared Med IT sells applications and medical records solutions. New Century Global Solutions focuses on optimizing health care data and information.

"The theme in our group was we wanted to be professionally fun — I'm not sure what it is but I can pick it out in a book," Stutting said. "We're not going to be good university or a stuffy law firm."

All the tenants indicate that they were drawn by the atmosphere Giudici — also known for his Quad-City tree-planting efforts — has created out in the farm fields with a boulevard that runs through the park, natural-looking retention ponds and garden-like plantings.

"We wanted to build an office park that is a park," said Giudici, who often can be found out there mowing, picking up litter or riding his bicycle. Eventually, he hopes to build a bike path that would tie into the Eldridge and Long Grove path.

"Some think of industrial areas as old and dirty, this is the opposite," Armstrong said.

Lost opportunities

created research park

The Quad-Cities took two swings and came up with two misses when Dr. Michael Giudici decided to get into the development game.

Back in the 1990s, Giudici was a member of the former Rejuvenate Davenport — one of the predecessors of DavenportOne. "At that time we had lost out on a Weyerhaeuser project; there was a lot of hemming and hawing about where it was going to go. It was a real slap in the face because Weyerhaeuser had started here in Rock Island."

Not long after, Giudici — who had purchased 100 acres of farm ground at Interstate 80 and U.S. 61 — was invited to an emergency meeting called by John Gardner, then the head of the Quad-City Development Group, to put a land deal together. "We had a computer chip company that wanted six acres by the Davenport airport."

But again, the Quad-Cities lost out — this time to the [University of Iowa](#), "which offered them the moon," Giudici said, adding that the company later went under.

"That's when John (Gardner) came to me and said 'We can't keep showing people cornfields.' " Out of those disappointments, Giudici developed the Iowa Research, Commerce & Technology Park.

AT A GLANCE

What: Iowa Research, Commerce and Technology Park

Where: 120-acre office park located at in campus setting at the northwest corner of Interstate 80 and U.S. 61, Davenport. The property with I-80 frontage is

adjacent to the Davenport Municipal

Airport.

History: Developed by a Quad-City

cardiologist, Dr. Michael Giudici, more than a decade ago. It is zoned M-1, or light industrial.

Size: Building sites available from

1.2 acres to 100 acres.

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