

Leaders envisioned industrial park as tool for future

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A group of local businessmen and chamber of commerce representatives laid the foundation for development of the first of six industrial parks in Mt. Pleasant in 1964.

Young people were leaving the area for better paying jobs and there was no place designed specifically for industrial businesses to set up shop.

G. R. "Rollie" Denison and his fellow futurists formed the non-profit Mt. Pleasant Industrial Development Corp. and placed an option on 54 acres of land north of Mt. Pleasant.

After raising sufficient money to buy the land, the IDC began to develop and market the land to industry.

"We didn't get too many industrial prospects to begin, but we did get a lot of distribution outfits," Denison said. "We figured that was still good for the area."

Employing more than 160 people, the nine businesses of Industrial Park North include ITW Foils, T.B. Wood's Inc., Pepsi Co. and Central Michigan University's Extended Learning annex.

Even with a number of changes in ownership through



Sun photograph by Holly Mahaffey

Kathy Methner, marketing director for Middle Michigan Development Corp., a non-profit agency that helps businesses move into mid-Michigan, stands at the entrance of Industrial Park South at the corner of Broomfield and Isabella Roads in Mt. Pleasant.

the years, Industrial Park North is 100 percent occupied, Middle Michigan Development Corporation President George Dunn said.

MMDC is a non-profit agency that acts as a single point of contact for businesses considering moving into Mt. Pleasant and for established businesses and acts as manager for the IDC industrial parks.

Industrial parks are attractive to businesses for several reasons.

Businesses know up front that the land is already properly zoned for their type of business.

Another plus is the clustering of similar businesses in one area, there are no conflicts with retail or residential areas.

"People know that the utili-

ties they need will be there," Dunn said. "And they know they won't be an unwanted neighbor."

Property within industrial parks retains high resale value as well, helping protect a company's investment.

North and Industrial Park South, which is located northeast of Isabella and Broomfield, are both designated by the state as "certified business parks", Dunn said. They are the only two industrial parks in the county to meet the state standards for that designation.

On 135 acres of land, Industrial Park South has 13 businesses and employs nearly 500 people with room for growth.

A ten-acre parcel is still for sale in South and several businesses in the southern park purchased more land than they need, for future expansion or possible sale, Dunn said.

J. Ranck Electric became the first tenant of South, occupying a 20,000 square foot shell building constructed by the IDC to attract industry to the area.

"People like to see how things are going to look now," Dunn said. "It allows a company to move faster. Cuts off about 120 days of construction."

Shell buildings are finished outside but nearly hollow on the inside allowing businesses to customize the interior space.

IDC built a second 20,000 square foot shell building across the street that was immediately occupied by Larson Storm Doors.

Businesses in South include Eagle-Picher Automotive, Great Lakes Coating, Metal Arts Construction and MLT trucking.

Another possible incentive for businesses to relocate to the industrial parks is a tax abatement program.

Any company that satisfies the state definition of "manufacturing" can apply to the city for tax abatement.

Tax abatements for new construction are equivalent to 50 percent of the tax for 12 years, while adding new equipment qualifies for a 50 percent reduction of the added value for six years.

Industrial Park North and the Center for Applied Research and Technology on CMU's campus also are tax increment districts.

Tax increment districts target a portion of the taxes paid for reinvestment into the district or park.

"Those funds are what we

use to extend fiber optics, perform maintenance and pay for landscape development," Dunn said. "The better the park is maintained and managed, the greater the value of each company."

CMU's CART, formerly known as University Park, while not technically an industrial park, is designed to attract high-tech firms to the area. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation designated the park as a SmartZone certified technology park.

Recently, IDC, MMDC and CMU combined to build a third shell building in CART that was recently filled by Dendritic Nanotechnologies Ltd., a biomolecular technology firm based in Melbourne, Australia.

Other industrial parks in the county include Enterprise Park, Corporate Park and Commercial Park.

With very little expansion possible, city officials are always looking for ways to maximize the value of taxable property within the city limits.

"The main incentive is the businesses increase the tax base and they also attract people, which increases the tax base even more through the homes they might buy," Denison said.