

MORNING SUN

Volume 33, Issue 189

Mt. Pleasant and Alma, Mich.

TheMorningSun.com

Thursday, September 9, 2010

75¢

Two counties to join trade zone

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Imagine passing international items through customs right in Mt. Pleasant, St. Louis, St. Johns or Alma.

The state is now accepting applications from Gratiot, Isabella and Clinton counties on the U.S. 127 corridor to become a part of an expanded Lansing "port."

Currently local businesses importing or exporting items generally hire people to conduct their business in various port cities, such as Detroit, Baltimore, even Los An-

geles, Greater Gratiot Development President Don Schurr said.

With the recent establishment of Lansing as a port authority, and the upcoming acceptance of the applications, that can become a thing of the past.

It's possible that custom agents could travel to the local cities and pass products through customs right then and there, he said.

That's why the counties, which include Shiawassee, Ingham, Eaton and Jackson, that have been asked to join the Lansing port can be no further than 90 minutes away from the Lansing airport.

"We're organizing now some educational opportunities," Schurr said of Mid Michigan Economic Development and GGD. "So businesses will understand what the benefits will be. We're hoping they become familiar with the process, that it becomes less of a mystery and less costly.

"It's a major convenience," he continued. "It's possible customs agents would literally come to the shop floor."

Both exports and imports are included.

Schurr said he hopes that companies now importing and exporting

would do more of it. Businesses that do no importing or exporting now, could begin.

Companies in Gratiot such as Garr Tool, Crippen, Powell Fabrications, Aircraft Precision, Merrill Fabricating and Cartridges Are Us can only benefit from this new program.

"This is a real service," he said. "That's why I'm so excited. It makes it very attractive for companies to locate in the mid Michigan area. We're in a sweet spot."

Schurr said it would likely take several weeks to complete the applications.