



Hot spot for shipping

By Colleen Jones

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Tenants say the St. Augustine Industrial Park's location at the intersection of Interstate 95 and State Road 207 is ideal for its easy access to most shipping routes in the southeast, yet many locals probably don't realize the park even exists.

Deerpark Boulevard is home to more than a dozen corporate warehouses clustered along the corridor, bay after bay filling truckloads of goods for delivery each day.

A handful of companies — national outfit 84 Lumber, for example — were already operating at the site before, but in 2007 it was construction of the First Coast Distribution Center that drew attention to the area and a growing interest in industrial space in St. Johns County, according to Melissa Glasgow, St. Johns County's director of economic development.

The 200,000-square-foot facility was, in fact, a game changer. County officials were so excited to more firmly establish the industrial park that it offered financial incentives to Graham Commercial Properties, the Jacksonville-based developer behind the project, according to Glasgow. (The terms of the incentive package were modified in 2010 when the developer had built just one of the three buildings originally proposed due to the economic recession).

Still, over the next few years, 4030 Deerpark Blvd. began filling up, and is now at 100 percent occupancy. Its tenants include Conquer Equipment, a Vilano company which stores and ships its off-site manufactured fitness machines for home and office; Easterday Farms, a Washington-based group that repackages and distributes fresh produce nationwide; and Kehe, a large North American supply chain distributor (which also runs another facility across the street).

"The last few years, we've seen more interest in industrial development," Glasgow said, "and that is good for St. Johns County."

Conquer's chief sales officer Suzanna Pavelle told The Record that the business was growing and they needed more room to expand.

“It’s a big, open warehouse close to I-95 where we can get our goods out, receiving containers and shipping our products out every day,” Pavelle said.

Peter Crolius, regional director of investments for Graham Commercial Properties, said the site’s location is its best selling point.

“The access to the freeways and the logistical advantages to being south of Jacksonville and closer to Interstate 4 and getting to the Central Florida markets is big,” Crolius said.

In the summer of 2018, MAS HVAC, a Green Cove Springs company that builds commercial air handlers, opened a new 32,000-square-foot manufacturing plant at 4010 Deerpark Blvd. The company says 95 percent of its products are purchased outside the state of Florida.

In a interview with The Record at the time, owner Clarke Story was quoted as saying, “We’ve kind of outgrown where we are in Clay County. The location that we’re selecting is kind of ideal.” He added that he believed the local workforce would be an asset.

“It’s the best place in my mind to attract the type of employees that we’re looking for,” Story said.

Crolius said the First Coast Distribution Center has started putting Phase 2 of its plans into motion. The developer has filed for a permit to eventually build out one or two other facilities on the remaining 35 acres it owns. Crolius said they will not build on spec as they did the first time and would only consider large tenants.

Either way, the juncture is expected to get a lot busier with the County’s recent approval of a Busy Bee gas station that would abut the industrial park. The plans call for a 56,000-square-foot convenience store and 104 gas pumps. Busy Bee purchased one parcel of the property from the Graham company for its purposes.

County Commissioners are requesting that Busy Bee lobby the Florida Department of Transportation to add a traffic light at the intersection of Deerpark Boulevard and S.R. 207 because of all the semitrailers that currently navigate the crossing as well as the additional traffic that would be generated by the truck stop. Busy Bee said is amenable to paying for the traffic light.

“I think everyone would be happy to see that go in there,” said Crolius.