

Pittsburgh business marketing firm tours Fayette County

By Patty Yauger pyauger@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Monday, December 17, 2012 2:00 am

Fayette County leaders are joining with the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance (PRA) to market several properties to companies throughout the country and around the world.

Recently, representatives of Fay-Penn Economic Development Council and Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, Fayette County Commission Chairman Al Ambrosini and with others recently hosted a daylong tour for the PRA in an effort to showcase the properties' availability, location and amenities.

The PRA offers assistance to private and public sector leaders and economic development professions to market the 10-county region, including Fayette County. The alliance works with local and other leaders to attract business.

The agencies have met in the past, but just looking at site plans in a board room is not as impressive as "boots on the ground," said Andrew French, redevelopment authority executive director.

"This is an important time in the county," he said. "We do have a lot of economic development opportunities with the Marcellus shale industry and a few others. We want to be in a position to take advantage of every opportunity."

Beginning in Brownsville, the group visited several sites that would be conducive to new business or other development that are either owned privately or by a county agency. The PRA representatives also had the opportunity to learn of the county's access to rail and bus service, major highways and an airport.

The redevelopment authority is seeking a developer for property it has acquired in Brownsville and tenants for its South Union Township business park.

While Brownsville is facing multiple challenges that include empty storefronts and crumbling buildings, it does have a rich history and is located on the banks of the Monongahela River.

Rail service and a now-completed Mon/Fayette Expressway would be beneficial to anyone seeking to move products, said French.

The South Union Township property is also located in an area close to major transportation routes.

Half the business park along Matthew Drive Extension has been filled by commercial enterprises and professional offices, while the remaining 100-acre tract is being readied for future development.

“I’m very glad to have all of us working together,” said French. “It ultimately will benefit everyone in Fayette County.”

Michael Jordan, Fay-Penn’s executive director, said that the county is poised for growth and must have suitable sites to attract businesses to locate in the county.

“We’re looking for opportunities,” he said, adding that the local officials have previously met to discuss goals. “(Fay-Penn) has had a long and productive relationship with PRA with positive results. The additional partnering of the redevelopment authority and the county will enhance our success.”

With its focus primarily tied to the Marcellus shale natural industry and manufacturing, Jordan said that some available properties could additionally support residential development.

For example, in Springhill Township, several hundred acres located near the Mon/Fayette Expressway and within three miles of Interstate 68 would make an ideal residential location for those working in the Morgantown, W.Va., area, said Jordan.

In Dunbar Township, an idled manufacturing plant and a 300-acre tract that will be developed by Fay-Penn as a business park have attracted interest, Jordan said.

The former ICMI plant that produced ink products is located just off Route 119 and has several multi-use buildings.

“Here, we can offer three buildings that are ready to go,” said Jordan.

The development of the Dunbar Township business park, located near the Fayette County Fairgrounds, resulted after similar parks neared capacity, said Jordan.

For instance, the Fayette Business Park in Smithfield has only 22 acres available for development. A 10-acre tract likely will be sold in the near future, with Fay-Penn considering the construction of a speculative (model) building to meet the needs of those businesses that may not have the time frame to construct offices.

“We needed to branch out,” he said of the Dunbar Township business park. “We feel it is an ideal location.”

Groundbreaking is scheduled for the spring and will be done simultaneously with a sewerage project and construction of roads and other utilities. Fay-Penn also anticipates the construction of a 22,000-square-foot model storage building with offices to help draw owners and leasees.

“It gives us one of the best park locations for new business,” he said.

While the University Business Park, adjacent to Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus, was once limited to only military defense and technology-type businesses, Jordan said it now will be open to other types of companies, while retaining the high building standards.

“We think the combination of the (Dunbar Township and University parks) is going to be the key to drawing business to Fayette County,” said Jordan.

In addition to marketing its own properties, Fay-Penn has partnered with private owners of properties that have suitable industrial, commercial or manufacturing potential.

“One of the major properties is located on the Monongahela River and has direct access to the CSX rail line and barge capabilities,” said Jordan, adding that the Mon/Fayette Expressway is within a few miles.

The county not only has properties that are suitable for development, it has immediate access to rail, highway, air and water transportation services.

“Fayette County has historically been considered as having easy access to the Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Md., and northern Virginia areas,” said Jordan. “With the opening of other highway corridors, we have increased accessibility.

“You don’t have all of these types of transportation opportunities in every county; that’s why Fayette County is unique.”