

Berner Food and Beverage breaks ground on massive Winnebago County facility

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NEW MILFORD — Berner Food and Beverage broke ground Thursday on a [massive warehouse](#) and distribution center at Baxter and Mulford roads.

The company is building a \$25 million, 675,000-square-foot facility in the Rock 39 Industrial Park to replace the roughly 200,000-square-foot building it leases at 1240 Central Avenue on the city's west side.

"This location proposed by Venture One is sufficiently and effectively able to accommodate our future growth," Berner Food CEO Kurt Seagrist said.

It was this time last year when Berner Food hosted a ribbon-cutting event to mark the opening of their newly expanded manufacturing facility in Dakota in Stephenson County, where the company is based. The state-of-the-art building tripled Berner's manufacturing space.

"We're extremely pleased to see the growth in Stephenson County for our manufacturing operations, and we appreciate the support of this new project that we have received from Winnebago County as well," Seagrist said.

Berner, a maker of shelf-stable dips, sauces, aerosol cheese, ready-to-drink coffee and other beverages, employs more than 800 people. The Baxter Road warehouse is expected to initially employ 75 people and grow to 125 employees. A head count of exactly how many employees will be coming from the Rockford facility was not available.

The Baxter Road site is located on a 67-acre farm field directly east of the FedEx Ground facility and is part of an industrial tax increment finance district.

Mark Goode, founding principal of Venture One Real Estate, owns the property and credited former Winnebago County Board Chairman Scott Christiansen for making the unique TIF district a reality.

"This project needed a special TIF program," Good said. "The chairman of the county put together New Milford and Cherry Valley, and we are the only TIF district in the state of Illinois that is run by a county but includes two different communities. That was really this region working with their state representatives and senators to get a special bill passed just for this project."

Shortly before the Winnebago County Board approved the development [in the spring](#), County Administrator Carla Pascal said the development is expected to generate about \$675,000 a year in TIF revenue.

Aware that Berner had offers to locate the massive warehouse outside of Winnebago County as well as across the state border, Winnebago County Board Chairman Frank Haney said of Berner Food, "Their commitment to our community and their investment in it says a lot about their belief in our future."

Haney then offered a big-picture view of developments taking place in the county and said Berner is one of several companies who believe the Rockford region is a good place to do business.

"The pipeline is filling-up," he said. "We have a large, tier 1, auto manufacturer visiting various sites next week. The Rockford Area Economic Development Council is doing a nice job on this front."

Taking into account the construction of [Mercyhealth's new hospital campus](#) on East Riverside Boulevard, and the expansions and renovations taking place at Rockford's other two hospitals, Haney said there has been in recent years a \$1.5 billion investment in health care.

"We have added 1.8 million-square-feet of new or renovated space in Winnebago County year-to-date," he said.

[Barber Colman](#), a mixed-use development featuring a Rock Valley College advanced technology and manufacturing training institute, "is going to happen," he said.

"The airport is absolutely crushing it. They have added 1,000 jobs last year and anticipate adding 1,000 jobs this year, and a number of our municipal partners have individual projects in the pipeline for their respective cities and villages.

"It is clear that Winnebago County and the Rockford region are winning. Investors see great value here."

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