

Available land, qualified labor attracting more companies to I-39 corridor

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A greater number businesses looking for available land and qualified labor are turning toward the I-39 corridor in North Central Illinois for a solution.

Mark Goode, principal of Venture One Real Estate, said some companies from communities such as Elgin, Schaumburg and Elk Grove are looking to relocate to the I-39 corridor because the corridor has enough land to facilitate larger buildings.

“A lot of our customers are coming from the western suburbs of Chicago where land is getting scarcer because there’s just not that much industrial land east of the Fox River Valley area,” he said. “If you go east of there, there’s just not that many good sites left, so you need to look further west, and we’re at the first four-way interchange west of the Aurora market.”

The corridor also has a trained workforce capable of meeting manufacturing companies’ needs, according to Goode.

“It’s hard to find good qualified labor today,” he said. “There is a labor shortage. That’s why we think the Winnebago County and DeKalb County areas will do really well because they have a tradition of manufacturing. You go back 100 years, and those areas have always had a significant base of manufacturing. There are people who are in that community who lost their jobs over the last 20 years and are now looking to get back into that field.”

Paul J. Borek, executive director of the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp., said DeKalb County and other counties in the area have the educational resources to provide skilled workers within the I-39 corridor.

“Manufacturing is the largest private industry employer in our county and we have an abundance of manufacturing professionals residing in DeKalb and the surrounding counties,” he said. “Northern Illinois University’s College of Engineering and Engineering Technology is engaged in active product development partnerships with industry and Kishwaukee College’s automated engineering technology and pre-engineering and computer science programs are training more young people for skilled manufacturing positions.”

Area officials also touted the corridor’s location. It has a geographical advantage of being a toll-free north-south expressway from Madison, Wisconsin to Bloomington, Ill., and it forms crossroads with several large east-west highways, such as I-88 and I-80. The area also benefits from being close enough to Chicago to enjoy the infrastructural benefits of a major market, but far enough away to have only the fraction of the traffic.

“The location allows companies to serve a broad geographic area in addition to Chicago,” said Janyce Fadden, executive director of the Rockford, Ill.-based I-39 Logistics Corridor Association.

“You can leave your facility and in five minutes be at highway traffic speeds. For companies that are serving Chicago and a broader region, I-39 has a lot of benefit to them.”

Meanwhile, Goode predicted the I-39 Corridor will continue to see a very active year as industrial parks throughout the region continue to develop.

“You have a lot of parks that are now established, and companies are starting to recognize the I-39 corridor as the location that’s viable for their operation for a lot of different reasons,” he said.

Venture One’s Park 88, a 450-acre industrial park outside of DeKalb, has been very successful in luring big firms for ground-up construction. Retailer Target Corp. developed a 1.5 million-square-foot facility and Minneapolis-based 3M has two facilities – a 410,400-square-foot distribution center and a 650,000-square-foot regional distribution center. Venture One and Clayco also recently acquired the remaining 350 acres of industrial land at Park 88.

In addition, Nippon Sharyo U.S.A. is constructing its first manufacturing facility in America – a 465,556-square-foot plant in Rochelle, IL. – to make electric commuter and high-speed railcars for the U.S. market. Jason T. Anderson, director of the Greater Rochelle Economic Development Corporation, said the facility will be fully operational in late May or early June and will be ready to ship railcars in October.

Coated Sand Solutions, a subsidiary of U.S. Silica Inc., also acquired 28.05 acres on the east side of Steward Road across from the Prologis Business Park. The company is building a 140,000-square-foot manufacturing facility to house its Midwest operations. Coated Sand Solutions hopes to move into its new 140,000-square-foot facility during the third quarter of 2013 when the project is completed.

“Between those two projects together, they’re going produce about 350 to 400 jobs,” Anderson said.