

Seeing Value Where Others See Blight

Developer turns “brownfield” sites along river into attractive communities

Imagine taking land that has been abandoned by industry and recreating something useful, livable and beautiful.

The redevelopment of old “brownfield sites” into valuable, useful properties feeds the passion of Bob Stephens, President of Prime Development Corporation.

In 1995, Stephens began to examine the potential of well-positioned brownfield locations along the St. Joseph River in Mishawaka for redevelopment of the areas into attractive residential communities. These new developments are a significant part of ten neighborhoods throughout Saint Joseph and Elkhart Counties owned by Prime Development.

Born and raised in the area, a 1970 graduate of Penn High School, Stephens used to fish local quarries, that have become Barrington Estates, and says even then he used to look around and think “what a beautiful place to have a home.” He says that when he returned to the area in 1993, what he saw was a lot of “blight” and abandoned properties along the river.

Stephens cites the historical trend for manufacturing and industry to locate along our river ways for energy sources and ease of transportation—later leaving environmental disasters along our most scenic landscapes.

Knowing that the river was always “a winner” Bob dedicated much of his efforts and the efforts of Prime Development to cleaning-up and reinvesting in these abandoned riverfront properties.

Three of Stephens’ high-end developments, Highland Village on the River, Barrington Estates, and Estates East at Barrington are examples of sites that were once considered urban blight.

Highland Village on the River, just south of Jefferson between Fir and Merrifield, is the previous location of the Volney Felt Mill and later the Owens-Corning Industrial site. Today, beautiful mature trees follow the creek bank and river front along the home sites designed in this newly developed community.

Barrington Estates and Estates East at Barrington, old abandoned industrial sites cleaned-up by Prime Development, are now one of the most attractive and exclusive neighborhoods in all of Saint Joseph County. In place of piles of concrete and buried debris are found highly-sought after home sites ranging from one acre to over five acres on lakes, creeks, and on the Saint Joseph River.

Stephens is also instrumental in the redevelopment on Jefferson Boulevard between Fir Road and Merrifield Street in Mishawaka. His efforts to buy blighted properties along this corridor, following the river, and introduce new and upscale services that meet the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods, is a windfall to Mishawaka’s east side redevelopment. With Stephens’ progress, Mishawaka will enjoy shops, restaurants and retail improvements to this highly-visible gateway between neighboring Elkhart and South Bend.

In June of 2000, many saw the old Uniroyal plant fall to the mercy of strategically placed sticks of dynamite and turned into a plume of ash, dust and rubble. The City and the Environmental Protection Agency then spent millions in clean-up at this location on Mishawaka's riverfront—once said to be one of the worst EPA superfund sites known in our country.

Mayor Jeff Rea of Mishawaka recently named Bob Stephens as the Developer of this entire site which spans along the river from the 100 Center and east across Main Street to the island by the police station.

Stephens named his newest development opportunity “IronWorks of Mishawaka” to recognize the City as it was first known—Saint Joseph of Iron Works. Now his passion is to design and offer a quality mixed-use, Mishawaka new urban development reminiscent of a rustic European village on the old Uniroyal site.

This “Smart Growth” will create a legacy for Mishawaka in providing a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use, river-lifestyle development where residents can conveniently work, live, eat, shop and play all within walking distance.

Stephens is genuinely passionate when discussing the philosophy of “new urban mixed-use development”. During the 50's, 60's and 70's, Stephens says, people left the cities for the newness of the suburbs. But the times have changed; fuel prices are higher, schedules are more hectic and people thrive on convenience.

Residential growth is also a huge part of the IronWorks of Mishawaka project. Along a renovated river walk are plans for beautifully designed residences from the affordable to the luxurious. Businesses such as spas, insurance offices, clothing stores and restaurants will mix and mingle on city streets with bakeries and coffee shops – connected by walk ways that will let residents get to their destination without having to get into their cars.

And Stephens sees the Mishawaka area as a true opportunity for families, singles and empty nesters alike. Mishawaka, Stephens says, offers the security of police and fire protection, the comfort of municipal services and the benefits of a wonderful school system. With new urban development, he says, comes a sense of “pride of ownership” – meaning people who take care of their city and watch out for each other. The way it used to be.

To learn more about Prime Development neighborhoods and for information about residential, retail and commercial opportunities, please contact Donna Durish at 574-255-5656 or visit www.primedc.com and also www.ironworksofmishawaka.com.

-- *South Bend Tribune, Saturday, July 29, 2006*