

Business

www.postcrescent.com

THE POST-CRESCENT

Monday, May 28, 2007

YOUR CONTACT

Larry Avila, business editor
920-993-1000, ext. 292
e-mail: lavila@postcrescent.com

Fox River developments are flowing with creative ideas

After many years of anticipation, it looks like the various marketing machines in the Fox Valley can start revving up for the opportunity to promote, as that mythical motivational speaker Matt Foley often said, being "down by the river."

Though Chris Farley's over-the-top "Saturday Night Live" character made negative reference to the river and the possibility of young adults with little motivation having no alternative but to live alongside it in a van, it's clear Fox Citians will soon have nothing but positive feelings about our very own Fox River.

And we should be excited, because what is likely to result is a flow of marketing and commerce so strong it might challenge the mighty river itself.

Just the other week the

Dave Willems
Market Smart



latest in the riverfront developments being considered received a few headlines when the former Kaukauna Utilities site directly under the E. College Avenue bridge in Appleton was sold to Tanesay Development, which includes former Appleton and Neenah resident Mark Geall. Geall grew up along the Fox River and he's excited about turning a problem piece of land into a jewel.

Most importantly, this development and others like it are critical when it comes to the future of marketing our region and, more specifically, the absolute cores of our com-

munities. Developers like Geall are laying the groundwork for tremendous economic development by creating a rebirth of the river.

Sure, the Tanesay Development project is still only in the discussion stage, but if you're like me, you were excited to see it and you also realize that it's just the latest riverfront site with potential of coming into its own. There's already been great progress, with much more to come.

Randy Stadtmueller got things rolling from a major project perspective with the former Atlas Mill, which now houses the Paper Discovery Center, Atlas Coffee Mill, and a variety of businesses.

Right next to it was where the Supple Restaurant Group fired the first volley along the river with what is now Fratellos.

Shortly after, Steve Winter and his team won the bid to redevelop a sizable site across the river and the result has been the very popular Pullmans restaurant run by the Readers, who have designs to expand even further in the Trolley Square building that makes great use of prime land that was for a very long time, well, lifeless.

In addition, Neenah has completed a significant piece of riverfront renewal and the former Gilbert Paper complex in Menasha is in the works for redevelopment.

This all could add up to a marketing gold mine. Folks like the Convention & Visitors Bureau, the chambers, and the downtown associations are all licking their chops. In the case of the Tanesay project, my guess is there's some really cool stuff about to happen on those

15 acres below the bridge, whether you're looking to live, work or play in the vicinity of the river. And it's all good, as they say, especially when you compare what's coming to what is there now or was there before.

Community development departments deserve a lot of the credit. The hard work of folks like Pete Hensler and Monica Klaeser in Appleton is paying off. We are starting to see some exciting, almost startling, results from their efforts. But the really exciting part is that it's all just a tip of the iceberg.

Don't think for a minute that the marketing value of all this is insignificant or "hard to define." It is, in fact, huge. In the future, the marketing value will be both measurable and immeasurable, if you know what I mean. The

value to the Fox Cities of that river, the one that worked so hard for so long as an industry driver, is incomprehensible. It'll turn from being strictly a blue collar river to one with lots of color — mostly green.

With all these projects in the offing, it's time to make Matt Foley proud and start thinking about how we're going to best market these tremendous projects.

It is exciting to think that, in the near future — if we market things right — the only vans down by the river will be tourists and visitors with well-lined wallets plus those of us locals who can't wait to enjoy the riverwalks, trail system and leisure opportunities.

Dave Willems is president and founder of Willems Marketing in Appleton. He can be reached at dave@willemsmarketing.com or 920-831-6580.