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South Jersey
Business

Camco's ripe for development

Officials promote their towns at summit

By EILEEN STILWELL
Courier-Post Staff

COLLINGSWOOD

This week real estate guru Brad Haber becomes a media celebrity.

The vice president of land acquisition in the Delaware Valley for one of the nation's largest homebuilders, Haber is the talking head in a $250,000 media blitz to promote Camden County as a good place to do business.

Ads boasting that $2 billion in new construction projects are under way in Camden County hit the airwaves Monday. Haber's confident voice will be heard regularly on radio and TV between now and the end of the year. The Camden native also gets to be the county's poster child for a happy developer in print ads prepared by Winning Strategies of Princeton.

Speaking to an audience of about 175 people at the Collingswood Grand Ballroom last week, Haber said he was glad to bang the drum for the county because officials "rescued" a difficult site in Clementon for his Red Bank-based company.

"Without them, we would have walked away from what is now a $33 million, age-restricted residential community," said Haber about the Camden County Improvement Authority's Brownfield and Redevelopment Center.

"Development has become a terribly sensitive matter with strong anti-growth attitudes. The county knew what had to be done and they did it."

Camden County Freeholder-Director Louis Cappelli Jr. said the county is committed to recycling "many abandoned industrial and commercial sites known as 'brownfields' throughout the entire region."

The purpose of the gathering was to allow municipal officials to showcase those areas in their towns they would like to see improved to developers, planners, architects and engineers.

"I'm here to get a feel for where things are going. For example Cooper University Hospital's $80 million expansion tells me health care is on the rise here and perhaps we should follow up to see if there is opportunity for us," said Avi Ghosh, of Greyhawk North America, a large construction management firm with a regional office in Moorestown.

"I'm totally surprised at the volume of development here. Two billion is tremendous for any county in New Jersey, but especially in the South."

Eileen R. Della Volle, of KS Engineers of Newark, said she attended the half-day session to learn more about projected growth in the public school and college sector.

"There's not a lot of gaming with this group. They're pretty straightforward. I'm here as much to scout around as I am to be seen. Getting work isn't always scientific. Sometimes officials give it to the last engineer they've seen," said Della Volle, who heads up business development for her firm.

The number of new business cards in and the number out is a fairly good way to gauge the success or failure of a session like Camden County's Third Annual Economic Development Summit, said Edward O'Donnell, marketing director for Legend Properties. His Conshohocken-based company recently became the leasing agent for the former Nipper building in Camden, now a tower of 341 luxury apartments.

Sifting through a fistful of new cards, O'Donnell gave the morning a thumbs up.

"I saw some old friends and made a lot of new contacts. That's what these things are all about," said O'Donnell.

Reach Eileen Stilwell at (856) 486-2464 or estilwell@courierpostonline.com

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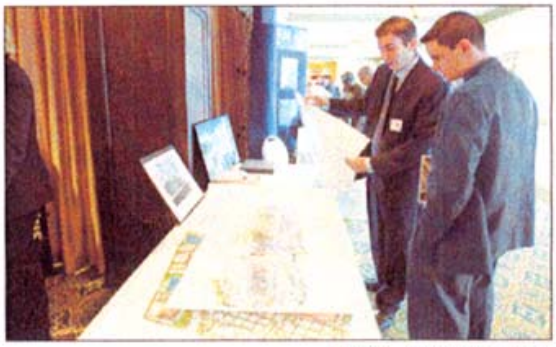

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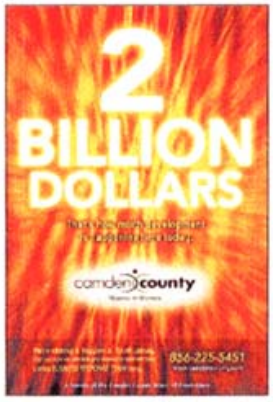

Photo provided

Tom Viviano (above left) and Barry E. Bannett; Ari Messinger (below left) and Christopher Donnelly view exhibits. An ad (below right) touts the $2 billion in projects under way in Camden County.