

## Investing in the Future

by Liz Hunter



It's a delicate balancing act for an area to remain true to its roots—those which served it well for dozens of decades—but also embrace a changing economy and new opportunities. Cumberland County is successfully walking this line with the help of local businesses, government agencies and higher education parties all working together for a common goal of showing the beauty and potential in this unique South Jersey community. From its foundation in glassmaking and established food production industry, to its strides in health care and technical education, Cumberland County has more than meets the eye, and businesses are taking notice.

### A Changing Landscape

One of the biggest drivers of development in the county is the Cumberland County Improvement Authority (CCIA). For 30 years, the CCIA was solely in charge of operating the landfill, but about four years ago it also became involved in spurring business and project development, led by Gerard Velazquez, executive director.

“Initially there was hesitation from private businesses who wondered why the government was taking the lead on these projects, but over the past couple of years we’ve shown everyone our intention is not to change the world, but change Cumberland County little by little, and we’re not going to succeed unless private entities invest in [the] county,” he says.

In the last three years Cumberland County has realized more than \$110 million in private investment, creating over 900 jobs. Velazquez says within another year, this number could be as high as \$250 million.

Some of the most notable projects in that number are the new John F. Scarpa Technical Education Center (TEC) of Cumberland County and the Center for Workforce and Economic Development, located on the campus of Cumberland County College (CCC), as well as the Arts

and Innovation Center (AIC) in Millville's downtown. This 20,000-square-foot facility is the first of CCC's off-campus buildings where students can immerse themselves in their coursework for fine arts, and new areas of education in cyber security, tourism and hospitality can be explored.

The CCIA is also working with Rutgers University and the city of Bridgeton to develop The Food Commercialization Center, a projected 27,000-square-foot facility adjacent to the existing Rutgers Food Innovation Center. Partnering with the CCIA on this is New Jersey Community Capital (NJCC), a nonprofit community development financial institution that has helped finance several projects in and around Cumberland County through its THRIVE SJ economic initiative—namely the senior housing development in Vineland and the AIC in Millville, says NJCC Program Manager Laura Wallick.

“The development of this center will act as a catalyst for economic growth by providing affordable, flexible space for emerging food companies both domestically and internationally who will create living-wage jobs for area residents,” says NJCC President Wayne Meyer. “NJCC is partnering with the CCIA on the project and will offer low-cost loans to the prospective tenants for leasehold improvements, equipment purchases and working capital.”

Another development project in the works is a multi-faceted Energy HUB that will include construction of a new data center, which will bring approximately 32 high-paying tech jobs.

Established businesses are also finding incentives to remain in Cumberland County with the help of the GROW NJ program, which eight county-based companies have been awarded, including \$8.2 million to Northeast Precast. It will expand its operations at the Lascarides Industrial Park in Millville while adding 50 new jobs.

According to James Watson, director for construction and economic development at the CCIA, this program has helped keep businesses in the community while they expand. “We encourage them to grow where they are and it has become a good attraction tool because Millville, Vineland and Bridgeton seem to get more money than other areas, which is giving it good international exposure, and companies from Pennsylvania, New York and California have shown interest,” Watson says.

“Businesses want to move where there is excitement and movement,” he continues. “This becomes appealing to private developers who want to get in on the ground level.”

Vineland's new mayor Anthony Fanucci is echoing the county's aggressive plans for economic retention and development in his own city. Vineland has long been known for its food production concentration, but Fanucci says it has so much more to offer. “We have highway access and we're the midpoint between Philadelphia and Atlantic City, and just a couple of hours from New York,” he says. “We may be the largest city in the state by square miles, but we have small-town appeal with [an] approximately 62,000-person population, with farmland, a great downtown and a variety of history.”

Fanucci, who is a business owner himself, has a unique understanding of the struggles facing small businesses. “Sometimes people can focus too much on attracting new businesses that they forget the people they have,” he says. “We want to keep the businesses we have happy and assist them while also driving new prospects in. We are aggressively targeting those not normally thought of, like larger retail and more professional services, accountants, engineering firms.”

On the construction front, Vineland's senior housing complex downtown is well underway, and other newcomers in this bustling location could potentially include two microbreweries. Plans for

a new police station are out for bids and Fanucci says expansion of other public services through rehab or construction is in mind. "We want to preserve the history, not tear down, and do what we can to keep the décor and integrity of Vineland," he says.

One of the biggest initiatives planned to fuel this economic engine is running fiber optics citywide. "We want to make Vineland a fast, smart city, and looking at the next level, we'd like Vineland to become its own ISP (internet service provider)," Fanucci says. "By doing that, [we] will attract small- to medium-sized tech companies, offering a lower utility cost, high quality of life and fast infrastructure." Combined with Vineland's already affordable electric, water and sewer rates, this would create what Fanucci says is an entire package for businesses.

Since announcing this initiative we've been flooded with calls from a variety of people," he says. "We have restaurants seeking information from the Economic Development Authority, and interest from web development and marketing companies looking at space. It's in line with what the millennial generation is looking for."

## **What Businesses Are Saying**

### **Premier Orthopaedics**

#### **Dr. Thomas Dwyer, president and CEO**

There is a lot of loyalty in the county between the businesses and the community at large. Our focus is to bring university-level care to a rural setting and in our hometown where we work and play. We are excited for our new flagship office in Vineland where we provide state-of-the-art orthopedic care."

### **LAURY HEATING AND PLUMBING**

#### **Sean Laury, CFO**

My great-grandfather chose this location. We service all of South Jersey, so Vineland is a good central location. ... New Jersey's Clean Energy Program is currently offering a \$4,000 rebate to homeowners when they install energy efficient heating and cooling systems in their homes, and many people in Cumberland County are taking advantage of this incentive in recent years." ."

### **STANKER & GALETTO**

#### **Peter Galetto, president**

"Vineland and Cumberland County are mid-way to the Shore communities, so Cumberland County supports business at the Shore and Philadelphia with a labor force and a lower cost to do business." ."

### **ACE PLUMBING, HEATING & ELECTRICAL SUPPLIES**

#### **John Sperratore, general manager**

Our company was founded in Cumberland County in 1950, so we are deeply rooted here. With our headquarters being centrally located in Cumberland County, we are able to service the entire South Jersey corridor. Even though Vineland has more square mileage than any other New Jersey city, it still has the feel of a close-knit, small town."

### **LILLISTON FORD**

#### **John Lilliston, owner**

Lilliston Ford has been in Cumberland County for 35 years. It was appealing as a location because [it] seemed like it had so much potential for growth and significantly new business opportunities. Also, we are part of the Urban Enterprises Zone which gives a reduced tax to help consumers in our area...as well as a tax relief for us as a business in this county."