

THE BERKSHIRES

Things are looking up in north country business scene

NORTH ADAMS — If change is necessary for vitality, the North Berkshires should be growing by their bootstraps.

Instead, the population and labor force have remained constant or diminished somewhat over the past 10 years.

But the prospects are tremendous. Consider: A brand new, but empty factory in a former corn field in Williamstown. A cavernous former textile factory converted for the growth of millions of mushrooms in North Adams, while another new industrial building churns out wood-burning stoves and furnaces. And Adams continues to look to Mount Greylock for tourist attractions including a possible casino hotel to complement the brace of national industries operating in the town.

Meanwhile, both Williams College and North Adams State College serve as islands of economic stability with upwards of 2,000 students each and large faculties and work forces.

Sprague Electric continues to hold its own as the largest industry in North Berkshire, with lifelong employees breathing easier since the proposed merger of its parent firm, GK Technologies, and Penn Central Corp. of New York fizzled late in November.

In addition to Sprague, GK operates the General Cable Co., Cornish Wire Division, with plants in North Adams, Williamstown and Pownal, Vt.

Certainly the situation looks far brighter than a year ago, when Hunter Outdoor Products and Inflated Products in North Adams and Clarksburg Coating, all affiliates of Cessna Land Leasing Inc., closed down in December, 1979, throwing more than 400 persons out of work.

This followed the demise of Hoo-suck Community Resources Inc., which had been leasing the former Windsor Print Works mill for an arts and crafts center.

Mayor Richard C. Lamb acted

quickly, taking over the Windsor mill and the former Hunter and Inflated mills, all on Union Street.

The North Adams Industrial Development Commission went to work finding new tenants for Windsor and some of the survivors of the Cessna debacle formed Cecile Industries Inc., to produce sleeping bags and other products for the Army in the Beaver Mill, given to the North Berkshire Economic Development Corp. some years ago by Sprague Electric.

Mayor Lamb then announced plans for a mushroom factory in the former Inflated building, with Stephen C. Lundy of Arlington, Vt., proposing to lease with an option to buy the building for the new venture, which is still in the talking stages.

Meanwhile X-Tyal International Corp. of New York bought the old Hunter building, again relying on military clothing and equipment contracts, with 144 new jobs projected.

A dozen other smaller businesses, with from two to 70 employees also

moved into the city in 1979, using sections of the old mills.

An exception was Mchawk Industries of Adams, which became the first tenant of the new Robert Hardman Industrial Park, just over the line in North Adams. Construction of a \$1.5 million, 60,000-square foot plant was finished at year's end, with the old Adams plant combining for production of three models of Tempwood stoves and the Jet-stream multi-fuel furnace, being produced under contract for Hampden Industries of Prince Edward Island, Canada.

North Adams lost out in the final selection process by another Canadian firm, Bombardier of Montreal, which decided to build its first U.S. plant in Barre, Vt., for the production of railway cars.

Williamstown boasts a "mystery plant," built in a hurry this fall by Gordon Walters of Steinerfilm adjacent to his own plant just off Route 7 south of the Vermont border.

Walters, a former Sprague execu-

tive, began operations in his basement nine years ago and now employs 100 at a new plant, producing metalized dielectric capacitor film.

Due to his impressive track record, Williamstown officials were willing to let him construct the second, 45,000-square foot structure for an undisclosed manufacturing operation, under the name Chadbourne Inc., with a projected employment figure of 60 by the middle of the year.

Steinerfilm itself hopes to expand its work force to 150 by the end of the year.

Adams has a well diversified industrial mix, ranging from locally owned Arnold Print Works to branches of Pfizer, Inc.; W.R. Grace & Company; James River Rochester Inc.; Holland Company Inc.; and Waverly Fabrics, Division of F. Schumacher.

But the burning issue is the future of the long-stalled Greylock Glen Resort, where various promoters talk about a \$60 million investment to complete the facilities, including a

350-room casino hotel. Promoters tell of more than 1,000 new direct jobs and twice as many indirect, while opponents talk about vices.

Williamstown residents are a little edgy about the future of the 1,000-acre Mount Hope Farm, put together 50 years ago by the Rockefeller family, but sold two years ago by Williams College to August and Pamela Mansker, operators of a chain of health clubs and a new program on how to succeed in business.

The Manskers started to refurbish Mount Hope in the grand manner, but in recent weeks have talked of re-trenchment. Locals are fearful of resale of one of the largest parcels of land in the town.

The situation may not be as dynamic as some of the growth communities in the south, but it is certainly not distressed either.

The winter tourism picture is also about 360 degrees turned from the disaster of last season.

Pittsfield expects a rebound in 1981

PITTSFIELD — For years, the annual prognostication on business and employment by General Electric Co. has been considered a barometer of the economy of Pittsfield and Berkshire County.

The forecast of Nicholas Boraski, GE's vice president and manager of the Power Transformer Department, usually has considerable bearing on downtown Pittsfield and its immediate environs.

Boraski described local plant employment as "the most consistent in years, averaging around 8,000 for the year."

In contrast to the past two years when projected layoffs were between 1,000 and 1,500, Boraski anticipates layoffs of about 300 in the power and ordnance areas.

Overall, Boraski predicts a good year for the plastics and ordnance departments, but warns that declining demand for power transmission products will pose serious problems for that department in the next few years.

Boraski said the local payroll will continue to grow, from \$176 million in 1980 to an anticipated \$190 million this year. This figure means about \$3.5 million pours into the local economy each week, he estimated.

Pittsfield was riven with controversy during 1979 and 1980 over the \$150 million mall proposed by Pyramid Cos. of New York. The issue was resolved when Mayor Charles L. Smith refused to accept the Pyramid proposal.

This also resulted in forfeiture of the \$14.2 million Urban Development Action Grant which was to have been allocated by the federal government.

Shortly afterward, two disastrous fires forced almost two dozen firms either to seek new quarters or go out of business.

A 1979 fire had destroyed two business blocks on the west side. However, Mayor Smith contends that the city's vitality can overcome such disasters and that downtown will rise phoenix-like out of the ashes.

The mayor's attitude is shared to a certain extent by Glenn Harvey, president of the Central Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, who points out that, despite the loss of 30 businesses in downtown Pittsfield, the central Berkshire economy held its own.

During 1980, several major construction projects were started and some are near completion.

Crane and Co. in Dalton began a \$9 million plant expansion program last year; Berkshire Life Insurance Co. started its \$4.5 million home office expansion project; the \$5 million Vicon Co. solid waste recycling plant was started; housing projects valued at approximately \$6.1 million neared completion.

Old Colony Bank, the First National Bank of Boston affiliate in Pittsfield, seeks a branch office in Great Barrington in addition to its two facilities in Pittsfield.

South Lee planning industrial expansion

SOUTH LEE — This tiny village town, located off the Massachusetts Turnpike, has been recognized for some time as a small antique alley along Route 102 by many tourists.

But the village, according to James L. Burns, Jr., chairman of the Lee Planning Board, will see an industrial explosion as well with construction this year of a \$2 million distribution center for Country Curtains, Inc. of Stockbridge.

The 45,000-square-foot structure will be built this spring and completed by September, according to company officials.

The curtain business currently is housed in The Red Lion Inn, Stockbridge, but it has been doing such a good volume of business, according to its owners, that it was time to expand. Owners are former state senator John H. Fitzpatrick and his wife, Jane.

In Southern Berkshire County, businesses appear to be holding their own, but many spokesmen referred to the national economy and high interest rates as reasons for muted growth.

Clayton E. Burke, president and general manager of Mead, Inc., which produces technical papers and printing, said the past year has had its highs and lows but the company has been able to maintain its employment level at \$80.

Martin H. Deely, president of Lee Lime, said wet weather last spring caused a slowdown, but he projected a financially good spring.

Deeley noted that projected sales of agricultural limestone are up over last year.

At the Schweitzer division of Kimberly Clark Corp. in Lee, there have been layoffs over the past year due to a slowdown in sales in the capacitor paper business, a spokesman said.

Richard J. Krueger, manager, Lee Mills, said that the mill is in a healthy condition and the company is recalling 24 employees.

And spokesmen for the food and beverage industry in South County said last year was a good one as tourists continued to find a spot in their

hearts for the Berkshires.

While many local people said the prices of food and beverages increased dramatically over the year, tourists from major cities apparently find the Berkshires a "bargain" for their leisure dollars.

What surprised many observers is that the normal eight-week summer vacation period with Tanglewood as

the focal point has expanded to nearly a year-round business for small boutiques, specialty shops, restaurants and small inns.

And finally, the weatherman did his part to make the summer good for tourists and the Christmas season good for tourists and skiers who favor the small Southern Berkshire Ski areas.

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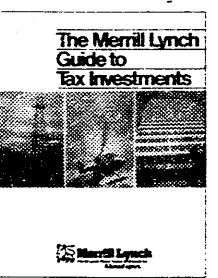
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