Airport business park ready for takeoff?

DRBA finally breaks ground on new commercial building in Lower Twp.

By CAROL R. RHENSS

ERMA — “Cape May Airport is a part of the community,” said Stephen Williams, Delaware River and Bay Authority director of airports.

Williams, himself a pilot, said he understands that a local airport is a part of the community, but it is “the front door to the community,” which makes breaking ground for a new building at the airport June 8 a key component in the vision that will aid in the economic well-being of the county. The new building will house small and medium-sized businesses. Williams described light industry as companies that do not utilize heavy machinery and do not “drain natural resources.”

The new building, which is expected to be completed by the end of the year, will cost $1.9 million. There will be two 1,200-square-foot units and one 3,000-square-foot unit. The building will be “configured to the needs of the tenant,” said Victor Fornetti, DRBA chief financial officer. He noted that existing units at the airport were rented and there was a “need for more space for businesses and that demand will drive where we go from here.”

“We have a number of companies that have expressed interest in leasing space,” Fornetti added.

The rents start at $1,200 a month. After decades of stagnation, Williams noted the airport’s current construction is “the culmination of small steps” and he praised the contributions to the airport that have resulted from the successes of the Flight Deck Dining, the incoming Cape May Brewing Co. and the Naval Air Station Jacksonville Foundation, which has contributed $1 million. The foundation “coastal rock” has “a sea change six years ago,” when the DRBA and others began to work towards making the airport a destination, he said.

According to the state Department of Labor and Workforce Develop- ment, Cape May County has the highest unemployment rate in the state, but that is part of the reason to change, he said. The businesses at the airport need workers for employment, he said.

Ridgway said making the airport a destination will not be an easy task, but it is “a matter of going to be done” to correct the problem, he said. He said he continues to re- mind of knowing they can come have expressed interest in leasing space,” Fornetti added.