

**Governor Joe Manchin's
Open for Business Report
November 3, 2006 Edition**



The November 2006 report highlights projects and related announcements that will assist with the creation of as many as 1,400 new jobs and the preservation of a significant number of existing jobs.

- **Resort developers to build \$87 million indoor water park in Fairmont**

The Water Works and American Resort Management companies announced an \$87 million indoor water park and family resort that will be built starting next year on a 25-acre site along the Monongahela River near I-79 in Marion County. The Volcano Island Resort project will infuse millions of dollars into the local economy and create as many as 475 new jobs. It will feature a 50,000-square-foot indoor water park; a 30,000-square foot conference center; a five-acre outdoor water park; marina and lake; multiple restaurants; full-service spa and 300 suites overlooking the river. It is expected to open by mid-2008, and will be one of the largest private development projects in state history.

- **Huntington customer services center to bring 300 new jobs**

Houston's GC Services LP will spend \$1.9 million to open its second Huntington, W.Va., customer service center and add 300 jobs to the local economy. GC Services will lease about 12,000 square feet of space in West Huntington's Commerce Park, with room for an additional 20,000 square feet of expansion. The company contracts with Fortune 500 companies to provide customer service, receivables management and strategic business intelligence, and currently employs 1,000 in its other Huntington center, which opened with only 150 workers in 1998.

Mark A. Schordock, senior vice president of operations for GC Services, said that in 1998 the company didn't realize how successful its partnership with Huntington would become. "So when we started looking at options for a new center, naturally, Huntington was a top choice," he said.

The new jobs will provide complete benefits, including medical insurance and long-term disability.

- **Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield to build \$27 million Parkersburg headquarters**

Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield plans to invest as much as \$27 million to build a new downtown Parkersburg, W.Va., headquarters building to accommodate the company's growing number of workers. The five-story, 125,000 square-foot building will be built across from its current facility starting by October 2007 and ready for occupancy by February 2009.

When the company located in Parkersburg in 1991, it employed 91, while today more than 550 work there. It expects to hire 170 more employees in the next 12 to 15 months, in addition to those jobs created by the actual construction. The move allows Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield to place all its Parkersburg operations, which currently are in three buildings, under one roof.

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- **State saves \$6.3 million with refinancing of bonds, has 'solid financial management practices'**

The State of West Virginia refinanced infrastructure bonds originally issued in 1996, saving taxpayers \$6,290,084 in future payments and making an additional \$470,000 per year available for water and wastewater projects across the state. The refinance lowers the interest rate from an average of 5.39 percent to 4.79 percent, and is part of Gov. Joe Manchin's "Responsible Government" initiative. The three national bond rating agencies reviewed West Virginia's finances and upheld the investment grade rating, with one firm acknowledging the state's "solid financial management practices" and "ability to tackle large-scale financial challenges."

- **State Small Business Development Center recertifies its top-quality rating**

The West Virginia Small Business Development Center (WVSBDC) refreshed its ISO 9001-2000 internal auditor certification to keep up with the latest developments in quality management. In November 2003, the Small Business Development Division of the West Virginia Development Office (WVSBDD) achieved ISO 9001:2000 registration for all operations including the WVSBDC program, the Micro Loan program, the Commercialization program and the Small Business Work Force program. The WVSBDD was the first statewide governmental small business development program to achieve this designation.

West Virginia Small Business Development Center representatives also received Small Business Innovative Research and Small Business Technology Transfer training in October, programs that expand funding and public-private partnership opportunities for small businesses.

- **West Virginia's tourism industry attracting international media attention**

The state Division of Tourism and its tourism business partners played host to travel writers from Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom, which is expected to result in magazine and newspaper feature stories in those markets in the coming months. The Canadian group visited three West Virginia golf resorts as part of a three-state tour highlighting southern golf opportunities. The German and U.K. groups traveled to locations across the state in search of the best autumn color. West Virginia's golf, fall foliage, wildlife viewing and hiking opportunities, in addition to its friendly residents, top-notch state parks and outstanding resorts are popular for international tourists. Canadians tend to visit West Virginia on their way to the South for the winter, while the European tourists find West Virginia easy to reach through international gateways in Washington, Pittsburgh and Charlotte, said Betty Carver, West Virginia tourism commissioner.

On the domestic front, members of the Society of American Travel Writers selected Elkins' Mountain State Forest Festival as one of the top fall festivals in North America.

- **U.S. Coast Guard to open maritime center in Martinsburg**

The U.S. General Services Administration awarded a \$30 million contract to build the U.S. Coast Guard National Maritime Center in downtown Martinsburg, which will bring 250 jobs to the area. The facility, which is expected to be complete by next fall and fully functional by summer 2008, centralizes licensing and documentation programs at 17 regional centers throughout the country and at the National Maritime Center in Arlington, Va. The center currently has a temporary home near Kearneysville that is expected to employ 45 by early next year.

- **Economists expect Eastern Panhandle to continue growth next five years**

West Virginia University economists predict that a diverse economy in the state's Eastern Panhandle will maintain its job, income and population growth through the next five years. Economic growth in the three counties of the Eastern Panhandle has matched or exceeded national averages the last few years. Dr. George Hammond of WVU's Bureau of Business and Economic Research said the panhandle's job prospects in construction trades, hospitality, health care and education, coupled with highly educated residents with high incomes, aid the region's performance.

- **Mineral County weapons lab to undergo millions in renovations**

A federal defense spending bill appropriates \$60 million for the replacement of aging buildings at the U.S. Navy's expanding Allegany Ballistics Laboratory in Rocket Center, W.Va. ABL and the companies under its umbrella provide high-tech weapons solutions and employ nearly 1,400 in Department of Defense contract work in West Virginia. Alliant Techsystems, one of the ABL companies, has a \$10 million contract to build rotor tubes used in nuclear power plants, which will create 100 new jobs at ABL in 2008.

The upgrades at the plant also will allow the Navy and National Archives and Records Administration to use the Mineral County complex for its electronic records archive program. Another \$12 million in the spending bill will support Alliant Techsystems' extended range munitions program.

- **45 West Virginia exporters recognized for reaching new international markets**

Gov. Joe Manchin joined the West Virginia Export Council and the U.S. Department of Commerce to commend 45 West Virginia companies that export their products to more than 70 countries across the globe. Manchin presented company officials the Governor's Commendation for International Market Entry, an award plaque that, in the tradition of displaying the first dollar a business earns, instead includes currency from each of the countries to which the companies export. More than 450 of these awards, representing export sales to 108 countries, have been presented since 2002.

West Virginia exports totaled \$3.1 billion last year and contributed 12,000 jobs to the state's economy.

- **Berkeley Springs company testing mobile surveillance system for U.S. troops, border patrols**

STS International of Berkeley Springs is testing for the U.S. Army a movable camera system that can detect motion along borders and across long stretches of land. The sensor camera units can be towed to different locations and adjusted to varying terrain, and could replace some troop patrols or give more warning to soldiers. STS President Ted Morgan said because of their portability and the need for less manpower, they could be used along the Mexican border, as well as around military bases, traffic control points and other areas that require surveillance.

The units cost more than \$1 million each, but might possibly replace a 10-person squad on patrol, Morgan said. The test units are built in Berkeley Springs, and STS is preparing to send some to Iraq for trial under real-life conditions.

- **Southern West Virginia company a world leader in mining equipment**

The A.L. Lee Corp. of Lester, W.Va., unveiled the world's first "combo" machine for the underground coal industry, continuing its nearly 40-year tradition of custom building equipment that makes underground mining safer and easier. The massive 25-ton ST-20, which was built in Lester, is a road grader, a scoop and bucket and a towing tractor all in one. The diesel-powered machine quickly and efficiently repairs underground roads, making a smoother, safer and more comfortable ride for miners, said Leonard Urtsos, A.L. Lee's president and general manager.

The company has built supply and utility vehicles and other underground mining machines for use in Turkey, the Ukraine, Poland, Australia, Canada, Mexico and South Africa, in addition to West Virginia. A.L. Lee employs more than 80 and has produced more than 4,500 machines used worldwide.

- **State unemployment rate drops almost one percent in September**

West Virginia's unemployment rate plunged nine-tenths of one percent to 4.7 percent in September, reducing the state's total unemployed residents by 8,000. Since September 2005, total nonfarm payroll employment has risen by 8,200, with the following gains:

- 2,600 in trade, transportation and utilities
- 2,000 in construction
- 1,300 in leisure and hospitality
- 900 in natural resources and mining
- 700 in educational and health services
- 600 in professional and business services
- 200 in manufacturing
- 100 in information

Government employment was unchanged over the year, while the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate declined a half-percent in September.

- **Small Business Development Center advises more entrepreneurs**

The West Virginia Small Business Development Center helped create or retain 69 jobs in October. Capital infusions into client businesses totaled \$1,388,500. During October, WWSBDC first-time clients reported that they employed 88 people. New client satisfaction was 100 percent for the month.

Economic Development Authority approves \$542,250 to help Cabell business

- **Huntington Industrial Corp.** of Huntington, W.Va., received preliminary approval on a \$542,250 loan to expand by nearly 10,000 feet a call center it leases to InfoCision Management Corp. of Akron, Ohio. The expansion, which will bring the building's size to about 24,000 feet, is expected to create as many as 100 new jobs within a year. InfoCision currently employs 279 in Huntington, and operates 22 call centers in three states.

Note: These loans do not include those EDA loans that received final approval in October. Those loans were listed in previous Open for Business reports as receiving preliminary approval.