

Milestone Years for the Industrial Park & Surrounding Areas

By Karen Ferguson, Town of Kirkwood Historian

Frito-Lay will be celebrating their 50th Anniversary in Kirkwood on Friday, October 25, 2024. While this is an important milestone, I discovered that the industrial park in which it stands and some nearby developments also have important 60-year milestones.

The Binghamton State Hospital Farm was in operation for 72 years when Governor Nelson A Rockefeller proposed that the farm, as well as other state-operated farms be closed. A public auction was held for the livestock and farm machinery in March 1960. At that time, it was still unclear what would happen to the 835 acres of land; however, legislation was proposed that would permit the state to set a fair and reasonable price to sell the land to the New Industries for Binghamton (NIFB) for the purpose of developing an industrial park in Kirkwood. A year later the State Legislature allowed the sale of 780 acres.

In June of 1961, a 500-acre Industrial Park was proposed and a study was conducted. Economic feasibility, site planning, and engineering studies were recommended. It took two years for the groundwork to be laid because of opposition to the sewer-water district. At the beginning of 1963 a time-line was proposed that included the start of construction for the Colesville Road extension, detailed engineering plans for the sewer-water district, and the engineering plans for the tract itself that would pave the way for grading, building of roads and other phases of the development to entice industries. At this proposal stage, there were no official commitments from companies to build there; however, there were some key prospects. The goal was to have fully developed lands available at reasonable prices by Fall 1963.

Finally in April 1964, bids were accepted for the construction of water and sewage mains. At this point 2 firms had announced plans to build in the new industrial park: Railway Express Agency (REA) and Vail-Ballou. REA starting building first and put up a one-story terminal on 3-1/2 acres.

With the construction of the industrial park finally beginning, a nearby site was prime property for the development of a new shopping center at Five-Mile Point. Mr. Knowlton and Malcolm Hunter were the developers of the 5-acre site that they referred to as the Five Points Shopping Plaza. The plaza would house an A&P supermarket, the Kirkwood Pharmacy, and a branch office for the First City National Bank. They also proposed space for a restaurant, laundromat, beauty shop and gift shop. (This property was the former home of Donald Goetz and Ruth Eckert.) The timeline for completion was midwinter of 1964.

In June of 1964 came the announcement Kason Hardware Corporation will start building on 12 acres in the industrial park. Two weeks later another announcement was made that Link had purchased 33 acres from NIFB to locate in Kirkwood.

Simultaneous to the development of the area was the opening of the Penn-Can Highway which spurred this industrial growth. The 40-mile section that took three years to build was officially opened on August 17, 1961 that allowed traffic to travel south from Five-Mile Point. During the opening ceremony, state

highway officials disclosed that they were accelerating plans to complete the Penn-Can Highway (I-81) north through Binghamton as well as construction of the east-west Route 17 expressway. Also a new Conklin bridge was being constructed that would span across the railroad tracks and Susquehanna River to connect Highway 11 and Route 7.

Additionally, it was announced that the Holiday Inn said they were preparing to begin construction in 1962 for a motel near the intersection of Route 17 & the new Interstate Route 81.

With all this new development and hiring of workers brought a need for housing for all the employees. This need was met primarily with a large housing development located on the north of Strap Mill Road (known now as Stratmill Rd).

In this brief summary, it is apparent that the Kirkwood area experienced much growth and change 60 years ago that created a domino effect for several years.