

In the midst of the desert is a science, technology oasis

I grew up in the Tri-Cities. I graduated from Richland High (Go Bombers!), and rarely drove farther north than Hanford High School — I only went that “far” because I was either playing or watching a sporting event.

To my knowledge, there really wasn't anything to see past the school.

Today, I travel past Hanford High daily to my job at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, and I'm amazed by the recent land development in the area. If you think residential building is booming, you should see the commercial, office and laboratory development in north Richland.

Much of the boom is part of the Tri-Cities Research District, a designated State of Washington Innovation Partnership Zone. The district includes about 1,600 acres of land for commercial or high technology businesses. About half of this acreage already is spoken for or has a building going up on it.

One developer applied for a permit for the first of two buildings, according to Diahann Howard, Port of Benton's director of economic develop-

ment and governmental affairs and executive director of the Tri-Cities Research District. The first building is 25,000 square feet and the second is 35,000 square feet.



Andrea Turner

Economic Diversity

Another developer is planning two or three more office buildings and the port also graded 15 acres of waterfront property for prime office development just north of Penford Foods.

The Port of Benton also has a couple of other parcels of land that are available for commercial buildings. Behind Western Sintering on Stevens Drive are 71 acres of land now called the Richland Innovation Center, and there are several pockets of available commercial land along First Street.

And in June, the port plans a public meeting to discuss some fun uses for the outdoor facilities along the public

trail system, including a launch site for nonmotorized boats such as kayaks and canoes, and a sail park that would be home to the surplus conning tower from the USS Triton.

“Triton was the first nuclear submarine to go around the world submerged. We hope its sail will be at the port this summer and that it'll become a tourist attraction,” Howard said.

Another group of prominent investors in north Richland is represented by Solaris Group, LLC.

Jessica Blankenship, chief operating officer and counsel for Solaris, said the new Bechtel office and warehouse make up 280,000 square feet. Bechtel occupies the warehouse portion, which is 240,000 square feet, with 30,000 square feet of offices. The remaining 10,000 square feet is vacant and likely will be used as turnaround space for future tenants.

PNNL also is expanding its campus with three new facilities. The Physical Sciences, Computational Sciences and Biological Sciences Facilities will make up 350,000 square feet of new space, and all are scheduled to be completed by 2011.

So what's the driver behind all this new development?

“The designation of Washington State University Tri-Cities as a four-year school, plus PNNL's science and technology base has reaffirmed what this community has known for a long time — that we have two great assets in our backyard,” Howard said. “We want to use these assets to attract new science and technology businesses to this area.

And we're thinking of the Research District as an “innovation ecosystem,” Howard said. “We want the area to be a test bed for sustainable energy technologies in an effort to be a leader in energy independence. Future development in the Research District will use sustainable building practices, meaning providing economic opportunity while minimizing environmental impact.”

A master plan is being developed for a 300-acre parcel within the Research District. The master plan parcel is the area bounded by Battelle Boulevard, Stevens Drive, George Washington Way and Hanford Street, and it may include covenants that are

based on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design guidelines. LEED is “a third party certification program and the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings.”

Speaking of green, WSU Tri-Cities and PNNL recently dedicated the 57,000-square-foot Bioproducts, Sciences and Engineering Laboratory, which also is within the Research District.

And if I had more space, I'd tell you about three other buildings under construction by two long-time Richland developers and the townhouses along the river; we'll save this for a later date.

“From our vantage point, we don't see the growth slowing down,” Howard added.

Looks like I'll need to keep paying attention during my drive to the laboratory. If I blink, I might miss a new building going up.

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