

GLASSBORO

Sky-high expectations

Officials offer a bird's-eye look at Rowan Blvd.

By Jessica Driscoll

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GLASSBORO — Mayor Leo McCabe said the borough is fortunate to have established its partnership with Rowan University and Sora Holdings before the worst of the economic downturn as the trio's \$300 million redevelopment project, **Rowan Boulevard**, has already begun to benefit the town and its residents.

"We need to have economic growth, to create jobs and to maintain a tax base, especially in the current market," said McCabe. "This project will have a long-term benefit for the borough."

On Wednesday, project officials presented a virtual flyover of what the completed boulevard will look like and a walking tour to show what has been accomplished so far.

"Rowan Boulevard is our community stimulus package in a tough economic time," said Borough Administrator Joe Brigandi. "In the current budget, Sora contributed \$565,000 in revenue despite the economy being the way it is and the project has already created about 400 construction jobs which will continue as we develop each phase. The project will provide about 700 new permanent jobs and gen-

erate \$1.2 million yearly when it is completed."

Along the boulevard, Phase I of student housing opened last September and the 36,000-square-foot Barnes and Noble collegiate superstore along with Phase II of student housing are set to open this fall. The 100-room Marriott Courtyard Hotel and Conference Center, the A-1 mixed-use building (22,000 square feet of retail space and Rowan honor student housing) and the E-1 mixed-use building (10,000 square feet of retail with a 1,218 multi-level parking garage) will begin construction within the next few months.

Rowan Boulevard will feature five, four-story mixed-use buildings with a total 40,000 square feet of office space, 185,000 square feet of retail space and 307,000 square feet of residential space. The boulevard is expected to draw at least 60 new retail stores and a dozen restaurants, adding \$48 million to the borough's economy by the project's 2012 completion.

An Arts and Entertainment district will be located on High Street where construction is already under way on the new Let's Dance Studio.

"What was envisioned more than a decade ago is

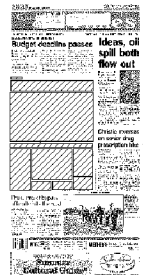
finally becoming a reality," said Brigandi. "Growing up here, there were no strip malls in town, no Deptford Mall and you started to see the deterioration over the years. Then, things began to improve over the last 10 years."

Rowan chief of staff and vice president for university relations Thomas Gallia said that since so much work on the redevelopment project was done over the summer, it was great to see students' expressions when they returned to school.

"Those students coming back in the fall or alumni returning at Homecoming can't believe it," said Gallia. "It's definitely improved the student experience because there was a shortage of student housing before that would've taken us much longer to address on our own and they can't wait for the opening of the Barnes & Noble. We have had 8,600 applications for the coming school year and I think they went up markedly because of Rowan Boulevard."

McCabe said the borough has also heard a lot of positive reactions from borough residents and business owners, though some resistance was to be expected.

"Though there are always nay-sayers, for the most part the business owners who can see the big



picture of how it will benefit the town are behind us," said Brigandi.

"And I think the Barnes & Noble is a big rallying point with both the students and community because it's somewhere they can mix, have a cup of coffee and enjoy themselves," added Gallia.

Asked if there was a "model" for the boulevard, Sora Principal Greg Filipek said there wasn't just one town or college that served as the inspiration, but the best pieces of many.

"There's been six to seven

years of actually planning and setting the table up properly and in that time we've traveled to many areas to see other successful projects," said Filipek. "We looked at aspects of High Street by Ohio State, Franklin Street at the University of North Carolina, the University City section near the University of Pennsylvania and more."

Brigandi said that having a university in town can be a tremendous resource, but for many years that was overlooked by those who saw the negatives

like the fact that Rowan did not pay taxes and the presence of unsupervised rental properties. With the Sora-owned, Rowan-leased student housing, many of those issues were addressed, he said.

"As Glassboro grows, so grows Rowan and as Rowan grows, Glassboro does too," said McCabe.

"This will be a walkable, livable community that will benefit our residents and the surrounding area," said Brigandi. "Rowan Boulevard will be a destination."



A virtual flyover of the Rowan Boulevard project is depicted in this computerized rendition of the project.



Staff photo by Tim Hawk

Thomas Fore of Sora Holdings LLC sits in front of a picture of Rowan Boulevard during a project update.



Staff photos by Tim Hawk

At left, Glassboro Mayor Leo McCabe (right) and Thomas Fore of Sora Holdings LLC begin a walk-through of Rowan Boulevard at the construction site on Wednesday. Above, Gregory Filipek of Sora Holdings LLC explains the new Barnes and Noble bookstore, under construction behind him, during Wednesday's walk-through. Rowan junior Nicole Zuchowicz, 20, holds a picture of the finished bookstore at right.