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May 10, 2006 3:00PM

Downtown Mishawaka going back in time

By SUE LOWE
Tribune Staff Writer

MISHAWAKA — A local man heads the team now charged with developing what was once the industrial heart of Mishawaka.

Bob Stephens and associates in IronWorks of Mishawaka LLC hope to turn the 30-acre plus Uniroyal-Ball Band site on the south side of the St. Joseph River into an old-fashioned downtown.

Stephens said he wants to create “a lifestyle — a lifestyle where you can walk out your door to your restaurant or to your dry cleaners.”

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He has named the company and the development IronWorks after the St. Joseph Iron Works, the first industry on the site and the original name of the city.

Stephens' vision matches what city officials have talked about since the city bought the site in 1998.

On part of the site they see multi-use buildings with stores on the first floor, maybe offices and more stores on the second floor and apartments or



Local developer Robert D. Stephens, far right, is heading a team called IronWorks of Mishawaka LLC to develop the former Uniroyal property in downtown Mishawaka.

Tribune Photo/GREG SWIERCZ

IronWorks of Mishawaka Timeline

This timeline illustrates the history of the manufacturing area on the south side of the St. Joseph River in downtown Mishawaka called soon to be called IronWorks of Mishawaka. It was most recently the site of Ball Band and then Uniroyal plants. Most of the information comes from a report on possible future uses of the Mishawaka River Center prepared for the city by The Troyer Group.

1833 - The St. Joseph Iron Works was founded and the original town

condominiums on the third and fourth floors.

Conceptual plans also include more housing, ranging from starter prices to more upscale on the eastern and western parts of the site.

The Mishawaka Redevelopment Commission approved a memorandum of understanding with IronWorks of Mishawaka LLC Wednesday.

The company has 90 days to come up with a more detailed plan before the city will actually transfer ownership of any of the property to them.

Stephens was raised in the Mishawaka-Osceola area, graduating from Penn High School in 1970.

He graduated from Southwestern Michigan college with an associates degree in business marketing and moved to Chicago, rising to vice president of marketing with Stronghurst Investment Corporation of Chicago.

Stephens then helped form Prime Real Estate Development Corporation which has done projects in Chicago as well as Barrington Estates and other developments in St. Joseph County.

Local firms he will be working with include Lehman & Lehman Inc., a Mishawaka architecture and planning firm and Brad Toothaker, managing director of CB Richard Ellis South Bend, a real estate broker.

Other associates in the project include John Melaniphy who has worked on projects at Navy Pier in Chicago and elsewhere; Tracy Cross, a real estate veteran who has worked around the country; and the architectural firm of Arkos Design.

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was named after it. Industry was drawn to the site because of the swift flowing water on that stretch of the St. Joseph River.

1874 - The Woolen Manufacturing Co. was incorporated.

1887 - The company gained recognition for a patented knit boot, the "all knit boot." Development of that boot and other rubber boots and shoes lead to rapid growth of the company.

1891 - The factory became known locally as Ball Band, a trademark name of one of the boots, which had a black band around the top and a red ball.

1898 - The company purchased Perkins Windmill Co. to expand its facilities.

1922 - The company became a wholly owned subsidiary of U.S. Rubber.

1942 - During World War II, the company manufactured rubber self-sealing fuel cells to equip U.S. military aircraft. About 10,000 workers were employed then.

1950 - Uniroyal became the parent company during the 1950s.

1969 - The manufacture of footwear was discontinued and the Mishawaka Rubber & Woolen Manufacturing Co. was dissolved.

1983 - The number of people employed dropped to 1,350.

1990 - Uniroyal Plastics Co. filed for bankruptcy.

April 1, 1997 - The plant was closed and the remaining

employees moved to another location.

February 1998 - The U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and the city of Mishawaka began negotiations.

August 1998 - The city bought the site.

September 1998 - The first two buildings east of North Main Street were demolished.

June 17, 2000 - In an 8 a.m. blast, more than 5,000 sticks of dynamite reduced the five largest buildings on the site to rubble. The cleanup since then has included removal of contaminated soil and water by EPA contractors.

September 2002 - The city got no responses from developers willomg to take ownership of the property when they put out a request for proposals.

May 2005 - The Robert C. Beutter Riverfront Park was opened on part of the site.

May 10, 2006 - Bob Stephens, president of IronWorks of Mishawaka LLC, and a team he has assembled are named the main developers for the site.

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