

VALLEY NEWS

THE NEWS SOURCE OF THE UPPER VALLEY

Published 9/17/06

VALLEY NEWS HOME

SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISE

CONTACT US

WEB EXTRAS

VALLEY CALENDAR

CLASSIFIED ADS

EMPLOYMENT ADS

ABOUT
THE UPPER VALLEY

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

AP WIRE

A Win-Win For the Twin States

By Sarwar A. Kashmeri

For the Valley News

An event taking place this week perfectly captures the Upper Valley's interconnected economy, and demonstrates the impact of the area as the region's economic powerhouse.

On Tuesday, 14 machinists (all Vermonters, by the way) will graduate from the nine-week Information Technology Apprenticeship Readiness Program, held at the Howard Dean Education Center in Springfield, Vt., and go to work for Hypertherm Inc., a manufacturer of plasma and laser technology used to cut metal, in Hanover.

Vermont's tax dollars, deployed creatively by the state's Department of Economic Development, will have trained Vermonters to acquire precision machining skills that are in short supply nationally, and a high-technology firm across the river will get the help it needs to continue to grow. (*See related story below.*)

If ever there was a win-win situation for two states, this surely is it.

I have been thinking about these regional interconnections while spending some time with Guy Santagate, the city manager of Claremont; Scott Pope, the city's mayor; and Robert Flint, executive director of Springfield Regional Development Corp. What is striking for an outside observer is the similarity of Claremont's and Springfield's recovery trajectories, the cities' growth strategies and the tangible results that both towns are beginning to demonstrate as they approach their respective tipping points.

The most notable thing that has happened recently is the purchase and redevelopment of the Fellows factory in North Springfield by Winstanley Enterprises LLC, Flint told me. "Prior to that, we had been stuck in this frustrating paradox of big empty buildings and nowhere to put people. Springfield has 1.2 million square feet of available industrial space, and yet, if someone wanted 25,000 square feet, I did not have a place to put them," he said. "That is why the Fellows deal is huge for Springfield. It breaks that real estate logjam."

A local company, Kiosko Inc., will move into the refurbished Fellows building and is expected to double in size, Flint said. The up-to-date building Kiosko moved from

will be occupied by another local company, and Springfield can now begin to help other growing companies.

“All these years we have been doing the preparation work, and now our time has come,” Flint said with barely concealed excitement.

Meanwhile, in Claremont, the regeneration effort centered on three shuttered Monadnock Mill buildings. The town was convinced their redevelopment would regenerate the historic Opera Square side of town and bring new residents to balance the rapid growth of the big-box stores that have made Claremont a regional retail success story.

As I reported last year, the building in the center of the three mills will become a Common Man restaurant, with an open terrace that overlooks the cascading Monadnock River. The building on its left, with 54,000 square feet, will be converted into business offices; and the building on the right will be converted to 47 condominiums.

“While the deal was completed more slowly than we liked, it finally did close this year,” Santagate told me. “For the first time in 50 years these historic buildings will again belong to private individuals who have made sizeable commitments to the city.”

Lebanon and the surrounding areas are booming, Santagate said, and both he and Flint noted that the scarcity of housing for the workers there can only drive growth in Claremont and Springfield. But all three officials pointed out that it wasn't in the best interest of their cities or the Lebanon-Hanover area to let Claremont and Springfield develop as bedroom communities.

“Before people come to our region to take a job, they want to know what their spouse is going to do in the towns where they will live, and what they will do together after work,” Pope said. “So it is vital that we develop jobs in Claremont, and schools and parks and the infrastructure that people expect in places where they choose to live.”

Fortunately for both cities, they wisely have been making investments in those unseen, unglamorous infrastructure projects that are the lifeblood of a vibrant community: water and sewer, schools, law enforcement, roads and parks. Santagate told me the single most important development in Claremont in his tenure was the establishment this year of a local branch of Granite State College. “It brings education to the city, brings an element of youth to the city, and it brings customers to downtown.”

Flint pointed out that, just as the Lebanon-Hanover area was outgrowing its housing stock, it may be reaching the end of large parcels of land that can be developed as commercial-industrial centers. “We are seeing housing migrate south. Perhaps the same will happen with commercial-industrial property,” he said. “Come on down, we are ready to do business.”

Both Claremont and Springfield are large municipalities, the former with 9,000 people and the latter with 14,000. Both already have an installed base of infrastructure to support significant additional growth. Both are lucky to have managerial talent that sees the big picture but doesn't forget that reality begins at home. Both are the kind of assets that New Hampshire and Vermont should keep high on their radar screens, and the towns and cities to the north should count both as two of their strongest future partners.

Which is why the event on Tuesday is so important for the Upper Valley.

Sarwar A. Kashmeri of Reading, Vt., advises corporations on communications and marketing strategy and is a fellow of the Foreign Policy Association. This twice-monthly column explores the Upper Valley's "business climate," focusing on the issues and conditions affecting the region's economic health. Kashmeri can be reached at skashmeri@aol.com.

[Back to the story index](#)

[Valley](#)

[News](#)

[Home](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Web Extras](#)

[Valley](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Classified](#)

[Ads](#)

[Employment](#)

[Ads The](#)

[Upper](#)

[Valley](#)

[Associated](#)

[Press](#)