

Texas City's other new business development district

By LEONARD WOOLSEY Mar 8, 2017

If you've not visited downtown Texas City lately, you've not seen Texas City.

Development of Texas City is easy to spot along Interstate 45. From the projected 7,000 Lago Mar rooftops to the planned Adventureland amusement park, growth is easy to recognize. But a few miles east in the traditional downtown district, there is another boom occurring — this one fueled by cooperation of both local business owners and the city.

“Helping businesses beautify themselves leads to an overall more attractive city. It instills pride,” City Secretary Nick Finan said in an earlier interview about the city's investment in the downtown district.

Since March 2014, the city has spent about \$76,280 to help Sixth Street businesses paint, add signs and awning to their store fronts, according to the city.

Furthermore, since 2012, Texas City, with assistance from the county, completed street and streetscape improvements in the historic section of Sixth Street, including widening the sidewalks, adding esplanades and pedestrian crossing sections and decorative lighting.

Since then, the city has spent nearly \$1 million restoring the Texas City Museum and has funded the demolition of dilapidated buildings on Sixth Street, among other things.

The results are attracting attention and interest of local business owners.

“Without a doubt the city's willingness to help small businesses and the interest they've taken in its revitalization” was a reason to open, said Manny Lopez, owner of El Cubano Cigar Factory at 520 Sixth St. Lopez has had his shop and factory in Texas City for about four years.

Today communities find themselves chasing and competing for chain stores or giving away property to grow their economic base. But what Texas City is doing is making a concerted effort to set the table of their traditional downtown to thrive in coming years.

With targeted investment, a willingness to bring new individually owned businesses to the community, it is helping establish a stable and attractive economy not offered by simply chasing big box clients.

With local owners come local impact. The locally hired employees spend their locally earned money in their hometown. The owners of the small businesses pay local taxes or purchase supplies from other local businesses.

And the best thing is the community wins in this pay-it-forward equation.

Even Galveston County's own local ice creamery, Hey Mikey's Ice Cream, is investing into the up-and-coming Texas City downtown district.

Michael Bouvier and the city's economic development officials worked to bring the growing business to Texas City.

“They came up with an incentive deal that was unbelievable,” Michael Bouvier said.

Were it not for the incentives, Bouvier likely would not have opened on Sixth Street, he said.

“I think we're at the beginning of a boom,” Bouvier said. “I think this area will change a lot in the next five years and I'm happy to be in the ground floor of it.”

Lessons are to be learned by Texas City's leadership.

Through what appears to be progressive incentives and a balanced strategy of investment, Texas City is working to ensure its downtown district is positioned for sustainable growth for many years.

And for local residents, that is a tasty outcome.

- **Leonard Woolsey**

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President & Publisher of The Galveston County Daily News.