

HEADED TO THE SUNNY SIDE OF MAINE STREET

Production plant's phased replacement sees packaging migrate across the road, with printing and offices expected to follow

BY JIM ROSENBERG

FOR THE *SUN-JOURNAL*, GROWING OUT OF ITS PLANT didn't mean moving out of downtown Lewiston, Maine. It expanded onto adjacent property, as mailroom operations will hop across a now-closed street and the pressroom eventually will follow, leapfrogging to the opposite side of the new, 17,000-square-foot production plant.

Merely the first phase in replacing all production facilities — and perhaps the newspaper's headquarters as well — the current construction is slated to be completed by the summer, according to

Dario DiMare, president of Dario Designs Inc., Framingham, Mass., planning, design, and engineering services consultant on the \$3.5-million project.

Though a local historical society resisted razing one building and tenants of another had to relocate (with financial assistance), the paper bought property across the street behind its headquarters. "The city gave them a lot of incentives to stay downtown," said DiMare. "The newspaper was very sensitive not to be given concessions that wouldn't be given to any other industry."

In addition to rebating a fifth of the paper's property taxes over 10 years and paying for utility work, the city ceded a section of street between the new and old buildings, donated a small adjacent lot, and agreed to pay as much as \$125,700 in demolition costs.

Quoted by *Sun-Journal* reporter Doug Fletcher, the city's economic development director called the paper a "unique resource" whose owners' decision to stay downtown sent "a strong statement" of their commitment to the city's future. Project planning dates from the mid-1990s and anticipates future investment of \$6 million. Neither Publisher James R.

Costello Sr. nor Operations Vice President James R. Costello Jr. (whose family has owned the paper through four generations) returned calls for comment on the project.

Last year, the 34,591-circulation *Sun-Journal's* news coverage and ad layout both



Beyond *Sun-Journal* facilities in foreground, a taller insert storage area rises over a former street. Behind it, a new plant goes up.

took first place in statewide contests. In 2000, it was among the top 10 U.S. dailies honored by the Society for News Design.

Management originally selected a greenfield site that "was actually more economical than staying downtown," said DiMare. Greenfield development allows use of lower-cost materials suitable for an industrial

park but not for a town that can show off an older architectural style. Work at an undeveloped site need not be phased, unlike an existing site, which must remain in operation. Further, downtown sites often have traffic congestion and no staging area for materials, equipment, and support services.

Another difference: work on an existing building in a developed area requires more "What-if" planning and often lead to unexpected delay, change, and cost. Greenfield sites have "much lower contingencies because there are far fewer unknowns," said DiMare. Finally, starting from scratch can mean not having to pay for nonproductive space through planning that obviates stairways, elevators, corridors, and such.

Using masonry in keeping with the area's look drove up the price. But building on the road bed, said DiMare, "reduced construction costs a lot." And an otherwise awkward addition was made efficient: Instead of rising, crossing a road, and descending, the paper's conveyors can go straight from the press folder into packaging. (Its old mailroom now holds newsprint.)

The part of the expansion adjacent to the old building stores inserts. With nothing blocking access to racks from the center aisle and high windows at both ends, the public can still see down the length of the structure, preserving some openness on what had been Middle Street.

That same plan now conveys papers right through the insert storage area on their way to a larger, Newstec 12:1 inserter (for smaller zones) and stackers, requiring extra conveyor length. So where's the addition's efficiency?

The conveyor path was chosen because presses someday will be erected on the other side, whence copies can be transported (on the same, reinstalled conveyors) to the mailroom without crossing the insert retrieval path. "They're willing to pay the short-term consequences of longer conveyors for their long-term goals of a more efficient operation," said DiMare. "So that's where the master plan really pays dividends."

It will pay twice again, at least. When the time comes to reconfigure those conveyors, demountable walls will make the job easier. And when the old building comes down, said DiMare, "We designed the [new building's] elevation to be very presentable." □