

New home in New Hampshire

Seacoast Media lands at former SAC base



BY JIM ROSENBERG

SEACOAST MEDIA GROUP, PUBLISHER of the Portsmouth (N.H.) Herald, has broken ground for a 70,000-square-foot headquarters at a 6 1/2 acre site at Pease International Tradeport (formerly Pease Air Force Base). The Ottaway Newspapers unit leases the property from a state-owned authority operating the tradeport.

Seacoast now divides operations between business and editorial offices in downtown Portsmouth and a production plant in Stratham, a few miles to the southwest. The company plans to sell both sites, but Publisher John Tabor told his paper Seacoast is committed to staying in Portsmouth and that "Pease emerged as the best location."

Soil contamination on the old Strategic Air Command base—part of which is still used for civil and military aviation—required remediation, but Seacoast's site was "not a bit" affected, says Operations Director Paul Briand, who is managing the project. He says location of the contained plumes are known, and that two investigations showed "we've got a clean site."

While all activities are expected to have relocated by sometime in 2007, Briand says the aim is to complete

enough construction by next fall to allow equipment installation, training, and possible printing of some advance sections on the new press. As of mid-October, Seacoast was concluding contract negotiations with equipment vendors.

"What I'm going to have for a period of time is a parallel operation," says Briand, who adds that the plan will not be in full operation until gradual transitions of printing and packaging are completed.

The challenge, he says, is to maintain one workflow while creating another without interrupting production. From late 2006 through early 2007 "the office part of the operations will be moving in phases," department by department, Briand says.

The building's architect, Dario Designs Inc. Vice President David Hogan, says the design seeks to represent the region's qualities, express the building's functions, and reflect the client's unique character. For instance, the headquarters borrows window shapes from all the towns it serves—its newspapers being windows on those communities, says Hogan.

The narrow site "forced us to design

a building that is over 500 feet long" — a shape used to express the business' various functions "in a way that mirrors the downtown facades" of the area. Assembling them into a "community" also reflects the client's goal of bringing together under one roof employees from the two separate sites.

Although the project's price tag was put at \$21 million, the Herald quoted Ottaway Chairman and CEO Dan Austin saying his company will invest "more than \$17 million" in the new facility. Briand explained that the latter figure represents the Dow Jones subsidiary's expected net outlay after the sale of Seacoast Media real estate.

Ottaway acquired the Herald from Thomson Newspapers in 1997. The next year, the business was merged with weekly publisher Rockingham County Newspapers. Today, Seacoast Media Group also includes Maine's York County Coast Star and York Weekly, the free Dover (N.H.) Community News, and seacoastonline.com.

Ottaway Newspapers' Seacoast Media Group will consolidate its offices and production facilities at this new Portsmouth, N.H., site, which it expects to fully occupy sometime in 2007.