

Deer Park Makes the Cut!

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Jenny Montgomery wrote:



Debbie Westbeld is Deer Park's economic development administrator.

Photo by Kim Christensen

A REPORT BY CORRESPONDENT DIANA NORTH

When **Bloomberg BusinessWeek named Deer Park "best affordable suburb" in Texas** earlier this month, the magazine credited the city's ongoing business development as the key to its evolution from a small town outside Houston to a city that can stand on its own.

Debbie Westbeld, Deer Park's economic development administrator, credits the city's growth and strong economic foundation to its "pro-business attitude, low tax rates, affordable real estate and the natural advantages of our close proximity to Houston and the Port."

"My job entails being a liaison between the city and the business community," Westbeld said.

"Whether it's a small business, hotel, restaurant, warehouse or petroleum refinery, I try to identify opportunities to assist businesses in creating and retaining jobs in Deer Park."

Deerwood Glen Business Park's 150-acre light manufacturing and office complex continues to expand.

The property was purchased by Clay Development in 2008.

Individual buildings house multiple businesses with more slated for construction.

Tenants include John Crane Power Transmission, Mustang Engineering and Code Red Safety, which provides products and services to oil, gas, pharmaceutical and chemical industries.

A fourth building, now under construction, will house Abrasive Products and Equipment, which sells and services air-blasting equipment.

New businesses moving into the city include Iberia Bank, which purchased the building at 1500 Center St., which housed the old Wachovia Bank.

The company has 204 offices nationwide and is a 122-year-old subsidiary of Iberiabank Corp., headquartered in Lafayette, La. Its first branch in Texas opened in Houston in 2009.

Integrated Power Services will lease a 60,000-square-foot build-to-suit warehouse on West 13th St.

The \$3 million project broke ground in December 2009, and will provide a humidity controlled warehouse for large engines.

Medsafe has announced they will relocate their distribution center to the new Deer Park Distribution Center at 4200 Underwood.

The family owned and operated company offers safety projects, safety equipment, supplies and risk assessment services.

"This is a big commitment to this region for us," said company President Burk Shaw. "We've done very, very well being here on the Houston Ship Channel and particularly in Deer Park."

The manufacturing arm of the company, called Reliance Fall Protection, will remain at 2101 S. Battleground Rd. in La Porte.

Construction on the new distribution center building began about two months ago. The move is scheduled for June. The project will bring 15 new employees to Deer Park.

Intertek Testing Services will expand its existing lab facility at their current location at 1114 Seaco Avenue by building a new 4,867-square-foot warehouse to retain samples.

The Lubrizol Corporation plans to make a capital investment of \$114 million during the next five years for equipment upgrades and replacement, process improvement and building renovations. The specialty chemical company has agreed to retain 502 employees over the 5-year period.

The project has also been nominated for the State's Enterprise Zone Program by the city, says Jackson.

"If awarded, this would allow Lubrizol to do significant upgrades while allowing the facility a break in state sales tax that can amount to significant dollars," Jackson said.

To qualify, a company must submit an application to the state and pass an evaluation.

Acceptance means the facility is exempt from paying the state portion of taxes. If awarded, the program would allow the company to retain jobs.

"We want to support and assist the businesses that are here," said Gary Jackson, assistant city manger. "And we also like to see new ones as well. We are seeing a little bit of both happening right now."

The city's first extended-stay hotel, Candlewood Suites at 1300 East Blvd, opened Feb. 11 after 11 months of construction.

"We've been getting a lot of inquiries from people working at the plants around here, who come here for a month or two to work," said owner/developer Barkat Ali.

The city's Walmart at Spencer and East Boulevard is in the midst of a \$1 million renovation that includes new hardwood floors, new cash registers and granite countertops.

The project is expected to be complete April 23.