

## Letter from the Mayor – Bill Berry

The Florence Township Economic Development Committee is made up of a diverse group of volunteers who work on behalf of the residents of the township to promote economic growth in the community. The Committee is comprised of business owners, residents, and elected officials whose common goal is to encourage and facilitate positive economic growth in the community.

The Mayor and Township Council work closely with the Economic Development Committee to maintain an active line of communication with businesses. Florence Township possesses a distinct history that includes farming, pipe fabrication, steel making, warehousing, distribution, manufacturing, and food processing. Our community has a diversified and talented workforce, and this makes us an attractive location for potential commercial businesses. When you couple these factors with the Planning and Zoning Board's willingness to expedite land development applications; an exceptional transportation network; and a utility infrastructure that is always being improved; it gives the committee an upper hand when they are in the marketplace competing for new business ratables. The Economic Development Committee capitalizes on all of these positive attributes as it focuses on selling new businesses about locating to Florence Township.

Over the past several years, many large companies have decided to build in our community and call Florence Township their home. Ready Pac, Wawa, Cream-O-Land, International Paper, Christmas Tree Shops, and many other businesses operate in Florence Township. Recently, Whitesell received site plan approval for additional commercial warehouse and distribution buildings in the Haines Center. Within the past month, the Planning Board approved a new Amish Marketplace for the former 84 Lumber property located on the southbound side of Route 130. The building and site will be transformed into an Amish market that is expected to open for business at the end of this year or very early next year.

The members of the Economic Development Committee, Township Council, and our staff of professionals work together to promote the tremendous qualities that make Florence Township a great place to live and work.



## **“Diamond in the Rough”**

by Paul C. Ostrander



*The Old 84 Lumber which will soon become an Amish Store*

Strategically located between two historic towns in northern Burlington County is a 2.3 mile stretch of Route 130. The opportunity for retail and commercial development is there for businesses looking for growth potential. With the recent completion of Exit 6 and easy access to the New Jersey and PA Turnpikes, Interstate 295 and the RiverLine, Route 130 through Florence Township has been described as a “Diamond in the Rough.” There are multiple opportunities for developers to invest in new retail stores to support a community on the rise. With the old Roebing Steel site ready to spring back to life, Route 130 will provide new businesses with many opportunities. With projections of 1000 - 2000 new jobs in Florence Township, these workers will be looking for retail shopping and dining opportunities.

Over the last few years, the Planning Board has approved several projects. The recent economic downturn has placed most of these projects on hold. Once the economy moves out of this recent recession, the construction activity along Route 130 will begin in earnest. There are plans for a hotel behind Wawa and Burger King. A new shopping center with a major supermarket is planned for the property on the corner of Route 130 and Cedar Lane. Another smaller shopping strip mall is planned for across the street. A major warehouse facility on the opposite side of Whitesell received Planning Board approval last year. While this project is on hold, there are opportunities for other companies looking to relocate to Florence Township. Whitesell continues to expand their warehouse inventory with an additional 1.25 million square foot facility.

As you drive along Route 130, you will observe many abandoned buildings and businesses. The Roma Bank and Mallard Creek Shopping Center were positive additions as you enter Florence Township from the north. As you proceed to the south, you have Roebing Bank and the new Rite-Aid. Further down, you cross under the Turnpike and have Burger King and Wawa on your left with U-Haul Self-Storage and Bung’s Restaurant as thriving businesses. The contrast to this ride is several abandoned buildings and businesses creating a look of struggling community. For those with a vision of the future, these abandoned buildings will be replaced by new, thriving businesses that will attract not only residents of Florence Township but residents of nearby communities including those from neighboring Pennsylvania. For this small community nestled along the Delaware River, the retail and commercial opportunities are right here. With public transportation and major highway access, the “Diamond in the Rough” will soon be a highly polished specimen that will bring back pride along Route 130. The old 84 Lumber site will be replaced by an Amish Store beginning a long overdue transformation along Route 130.

## Company Spotlight: ROEBLING BANK By Michele Deyo

In 1905, the Roebling Family had outgrown their South Trenton factory space so they looked to a tract of land along the Delaware River in Burlington County. This land would soon be known as Roebling, New Jersey.

There was a lack of housing, so the solution to this problem was to build the model "Town". 750 brick homes laid out in a rectangular grid were built for the laborers to rent.

The banking system came from Trenton with the Roebling's and the First National Bank of Roebling opened its doors. The bank produced its own currency but that all changed in 1913 when the Federal government standardized our currency.

In the spirit of competition, and to meet the home mortgage needs of the community, **Roebling Building and Loan Association** was founded and incorporated in November 1922. It opened its doors in early 1923 at 34 Main Street in Roebling where it maintains a branch, 88 years later. The Main Office location at Route 130 and Delaware Avenue had its official grand opening on September 19, 1981.

Local businessmen William Gummere, P.J. Goddard, Tom Callery, and George Alter Sr. spearheaded the organization of Roebling Building & Loan with the majority of the original officers and directors being employees of John A. Roebling & Sons Company's Wire Mill. The first officers of the Roebling Building & Loan Association were P.J. Goddard, President; Thomas J. Callery; Vice President; William L. Wilson, Secretary and Arthur J. Pigott, Treasurer. The initial directors of the institution were Samuel L. Major, R.A. Mercur, Raymond H. Thompson, William Gummere, George Watson, George Alter, Sr., John Thather, Benjamin Akers, William H. Keifer and Amandus Koberg

P. J. Goddard served as president for the 45 years until his retirement in December, 1968. The current president is Frank J. Travea III, who has held the position since September 2002.

Roebling Bank has enjoyed growth from its inception in 1922 thanks to the faith of its depositors and the confidence of the community. By the depression year of 1933, Roebling's assets were \$311,509.00. Starting the mid 1970's, Roebling began to grow at a rapid pace, from \$5 million in assets to total assets in excess of \$40 million at September 1997.

On October 2, 1997, a public stock offering was conducted so the depositors of Roebling could share in the ownership of the bank. At the same time, the bank also officially changed its name to **Roebling Bank**. Today with five locations, the bank has \$165 million in assets.

Since inception, Roebling Bank has maintained the original name and focus on our local marketplace. Roebling Bank prides itself on its superior customer service and has expanded its presence to the surrounding communities. Roebling Bank operates two branches in Florence Township, Plumsted Township, as well as Westampton Township and Delran Township. We now have a fully interactive Web site that provides internet banking for our depositors.

The current Board of Directors of Roebling Bank are Mark V. Dimon, John J. Ferry, Joan K. Geary, John A. LaVecchia, George N. Nyikita, and Robert R. Semptimpelther. Frank J. Travea, III – President and CEO



## Redevelopment: Roebling Mill Site

By Pete Darata, Vice Chair Florence Economic Development Committee

The historic Roebling Mill site once provided a thriving business, plentiful jobs and a source of pride for Florence Township for its central role in building bridges and infrastructure across the country.

Today, the site has been cleared, some of the massive equipment is on display and the construction of the Roebling Museum, celebrating the achievements and history of the mill, is now complete. Many residents in our community are curious about the future plans to the township in the recent past, but there hasn't been much visible progress. The latest news, however, is encouraging. Mayor Berry and the Township Council have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a developer named Develcom. Develcom has done several large commercial projects in South Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania, and they specialize in land remediation work. Under the current MOU, Develcom works in coordination with Florence Township to prepare development plans for the site. Develcom and Florence Township have met with the EPA on several occasions to determine what steps can be taken to move commercial development forward. During the term of the MOU, the township is not prevented from receiving inquiries from other developers who are interested in the mill site.

Develcom's proposal is to convert the site into a world headquarters for a major manufacturing and distribution company. It is estimated that Phase I and Phase II of this corporate development could create over 1,000 new jobs in the community.

Since the former steel mill site has contaminants in the soil, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will play a significant role in the progress of any development effort. The EPA has begun dredging in the adjacent waterways and has been depositing dredge sediments over the slag area. The EPA will receive federal funds totaling \$27 million in 2010 and \$22 million in 2011 to support this effort. Florence Township is pressing the EPA to conclude all dredging and capping work on the slag area by December 31, 2012. The purpose of establishing a clear completion date for the slag capping is so there will be no conflict with the potential opening of the commercial business in mid-July 2013. There are still some old building structures in the footprint of the proposed development that need to be demolished and identified areas on the main site still need to be remediated and/or capped as part of the clean up. The estimated cost of the demolition is \$3 to \$5 million, and township officials are working with the EPA to get them to commit to doing the work by mid 2011. The demolition of the buildings and clean up beneath the structures is essential to luring an end user for the site.

One of the major decisions associated with any new development of the former Roebling Steel Mill site is the location of the primary entrance. The initial proposal is for the main entrance to go through Spring Factory Road in Mansfield. The Township Council notified the developer from the start that a separate access road for truck traffic must be constructed off of Route 130. However, there is a possibility Hornberger Avenue could be expanded to support some degree of traffic for the Roebling Plant site.

A township project of this magnitude and potential impact does not happen without a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes. Mayor William Berry, Township Business Administrator Richard Brook and a Township Council sub-committee led by Dennis O'Hara, Dave Woolston, and Sean Ryan have spent countless hours trying to bring the redevelopment of the steel site to fruition. The entire Township Council is intimately involved in the negotiations, and working hard to revitalize this historically impressive site. It is a top priority, not only for the township, but Burlington County as well.

The successful renovation and redevelopment of the historic Roebling Steel Mill site would have significant, positive long term implications for Florence Township. The project would create many new jobs, increase home values, attract other supporting businesses near the site and along the Route 130 Corridor, and bring prestige to the township.

A final decision by the prospective tenant of the site is expected in the next 60-90 days. If they decide to move forward, it is estimated that construction of Phase I would be complete in 2013.

