

PRESS-TELEGRAM

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Long Beach's Douglas Park redevelopment builds momentum

By David Downey, The Press-Enterprise



A year and a half after the 279th — and last — C-17 military cargo plane took off from Long Beach Airport, Douglas Park, the former home of Boeing and Douglas Aircraft, is undergoing a renaissance.

Once-bustling assembly lines for Boeing's C-17s and 717 commercial airliners and Douglas' DC-8 passenger jets — not to mention a long list of other famed aircraft — have disappeared into the horizon of history.

But the former aerospace manufacturing hub at Lakewood Boulevard and Carson Street is fast becoming a hotbed of commercial and industrial activity.

"Douglas Park is an economic home run for Long Beach," said Mayor Robert Garcia.

City officials said they originally thought the 238-acre site, so named to honor its lofty past, would be finished by 2020. Now it appears the ambitious undertaking next to Long Beach Airport will be completed next year.

Upon completion, Douglas Park will feature 4.1 million square feet of building space and offer 5,000 jobs, city officials said recently in a news release.

That sounds like a lot. And it is. But it's modest when stacked against the tens of thousands who gathered there for decades to assemble more than 15,000 passenger jets and warplanes.

Still, what was terrible news for the economy — the loss of numerous high-paying blue-collar jobs — has morphed into something

positive for densely populated, built-out Long Beach.

"For a city that's constrained by its footprint, this is an opportunity for it to find more than a little bit of space to grow," said Robert Kleinhenz, economist and executive director of research for Beacon Economics in Los Angeles.

"Now you've got some surplus space," he said. "And it's actually in a pretty good location because it's close to the airport."

And it's filling fast.

FLYING HIGH

Already, medical offices abound. Mercedes-Benz USA has its West Coast headquarters there, after taking over an abandoned million-square-foot plant in late 2015.

That same year, Shimadzu Precision Instruments, a maker of aircraft equipment, moved from Torrance to Douglas Park.

And while planes aren't being built anymore, rockets are.

Virgin Orbit, a spinoff company from Virgin Galactic, has begun building rockets designed to blast small satellites into outer space. The plan is to hook its rocket, LauncherOne, to a wing of a modified Boeing 747 dubbed Cosmic Girl, then fire it like a missile into space while the plane is cruising at 35,000 feet.

Several other firms are getting ready to put roots down where backhoes are busy digging and workers in hard hats are scurrying about, in a construction campaign that spans several blocks.

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One of those is United Pacific, formerly United Oil, which owns 372 gas stations and convenience stores in California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and Colorado.

Joe Juliano, president and chief executive officer, said United Pacific is bursting at the seams in its 17,000-square-foot Gardena facility.

So, said Juliano, the gas-station operator is moving its headquarters, and 125 employees, into a new 40,000-square-foot building at Douglas Park. The move-in date is Tuesday.

MILLENNIAL TALENT

He said the firm will use 90 percent of the building initially, leasing out 4,000 square feet. The extra space will provide room to grow.

“We’re thrilled,” Juliano said.

“We wanted our space to be ultramodern so that it will attract talent and, specifically, millennial talent,” he said, crediting DRA Architects of Irvine for the progressive design. “We have a lot of amenities that are Google-like, if you will.”

He said United’s new digs will have a gym, game tables, large break room, indoor-outdoor terrace and lobby featuring a replica fuel pump.

Human Touch, which employs about 50 people, is also getting ready to move its headquarters to Douglas Park. In its case, though, it’s just moving down the street.

By the end of June, Long Beach-based Human Touch expects to make its new home a 110,000-square-foot building in the Pacific Pointe East development, said Victoria Lladoc, marketing manager.

SIZE DOESN’T MATTER

Size doesn’t matter so much to the designer of massage chairs and recliners. Lladoc said the Douglas Park facility is roughly as big as the company’s existing headquarters.

But she said the layout is more to the company’s liking.

“It’s a brand-new facility and it’s built to our specifications,” Lladoc said. “And it’s just a great location. It’s in the middle of everything.”

Lladoc said Human Touch designs chairs that are manufactured in China, then shipped to Long Beach for distribution.

“People who have bad backs definitely swear by our recliners,” she said.

Their building is one of three totaling nearly 500,000 square feet at Pacific Pointe East, next to the Skylinks golf course.

Another is the 220,000-square-foot building that Simplehuman of Torrance has leased, according to the Sares-Regis Group of Irvine, Douglas Park’s primary developer. That will be completed in September, said Larry Lukanish, Sares-Regis’ senior vice president.

Mia Fields, a spokeswoman for Simplehuman, said her company has no specific plans.

“When the building is ready it will most likely be used as inventory storage,” Fields said in an email.

“We currently have no plans to move our headquarters to Long Beach,” she said, “but as the company grows, things could change.”

Simplehuman designs products for use around the house.

SHOPPING, TOO

Douglas Park isn’t just industry and offices. A five-story hotel is coming. So is a shopping center — one with an aviation theme.

Under construction southwest of Carson and Lakewood is 266,000 square feet of stores and restaurants, in what is to be marketed as Long Beach Exchange, or LBX.

Developed by Burnham Ward Properties of Newport Beach, a highlight of plans is an airplane-hangar-like structure that will have an open-air marketplace, according to reports.

Steve Thorp, Burnham Ward partner, said the center is on track to open in April 2018.

Already, big retail names have committed to locating there, including Nordstrom Rack, PetSmart, T.J. Maxx, Orchard Supply Hardware, Dunkin’ Donuts and MOD Pizza, Thorp said. He said others will be announced shortly.

But it won’t be just a shopping center.

“It will have ties to the aviation and aeronautical world,” Thorp said.

RICH HISTORY

An open space feature will provide a place for people to gather, he said. There, he said, bronze sculptures of replica planes built earlier on the site will be displayed, with plaques detailing their history.

“It’s meant to be interactive and engaging, and allow people to reflect on the significance of the site,” Thorp said, “because it does have a very rich history.”

If one wonders what the center might look like, here’s another clue: Burnham Ward developed South Coast Collection, or SOCO, a high-end center in Costa Mesa.

A little ways down Lakewood Boulevard, at The Terminal, there are plans for four two-story office buildings that will provide 100,000 square feet of space.

Two are scheduled to be finished by September, with the others to open by March 2018, said Jeff Coburn, principal at Lee & Associates in Long Beach.

Almost all the office condominiums — or individual shared-wall offices — in the first two buildings have been purchased, Coburn said. Buyers include The Core Group, a Long Beach information technology company; CalCom Federal Credit Union; and Appraisal Pacific.

“We’re in negotiations for the last two buildings,” he said.

‘HOTTEST NEW THING’

Lee & Associates also is constructing a 32,000-square-foot building for MC2 of Torrance, which provides booths for automotive trade shows. That’s to be finished by November, he said.

All of Douglas Park should be finished sometime in 2018, said Lukanish of Sares-Regis Group.

For now, Douglas Park remains a beehive of activity.

Shaun R. McCullough, a principal at Lee & Associates, summed it up this way: “It’s the hottest new thing in town.”