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Rowan Boulevard to bring new life to Glassboro

By JEREMY ROSEN
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On a hazy Monday morning, officials celebrated the bright future of Glassboro with a groundbreaking of Rowan Boulevard as part of the borough's planned \$300 million downtown revitalization.

A few hundred yards away, Jay Ale stood in the parking lot of his automotive service shop and watched across Main Street as the former home of a late family friend was demolished for boulevard development.

"I'm not going to get emotional," said the owner of Ale's Auto Servicenter Inc., a 62-year-old family business. "It's pretty amazing. It's nice to see progress in this economic standstill."

At the groundbreaking, state, county and local officials as well as Rep. Robert Andrews, D-Haddon Heights, a project champion, echoed Ale's sentiment.

Andrews said the project can be considered a national model for economic stimulus that will create 400 temporary construction jobs and 300 to 400 permanent jobs.

"We're standing at what will be the hub of activity," he said. "A new Glassboro and partnership with (Rowan) University."

When completed, the boulevard is expected to attract some 60 new retail outfits, including a dozen restaurants, boosting the borough's economy by \$48 million, according to a released statement from the project developer Sora Holdings LLC.

Twenty-six acres of mixed-use development will follow the quarter-mile-long Rowan Boulevard construction.

Tom Fore, a principal with Sora, said the boulevard will take about a year and construction of a roundabout will begin next week and connect the university to the heart of downtown.

A 36,000-square-foot Barnes & Noble, which will also house a Starbucks Cafe, is scheduled to be built in May or June and a 107-room Holiday Inn Express & Suites and conference center is scheduled to be started in the fall, Fore said. Behind the hotel site, construction has begun on a four-story apartment building to accommodate 884 students. Rowan is also building housing across Route 322 for 700 to 800 students.

Officials said 10 years of strategic planning has led to boulevard development that will turn Glassboro into a walkable residential and retail community for Glassboro and create a quintessential college town for the university.

"I can't describe what it'll do for people in our town," said borough administrator Joseph Brigandi.

Ale and Main Street comic book store owner Alex Mattson said they think development can attract more residents to the borough and create more business.

Rowan President Donald Farrish said both the university and Glassboro will benefit from students staying in town.

"Part-time jobs are essential for students," Farrish said. "They won't have to drive elsewhere to find work."

Officials have said thousands of Rowan students create a natural buying power in Glassboro, but over the years those students have shopped elsewhere.

Fore said later development phases will include constructing buildings for other national retailers that he wouldn't name because Sora is currently involved in negotiations.

Some structures planned in Rowan Boulevard development, however, are five four-story mixed use buildings with 40,000 total square feet of office space, 185,000 square feet of retail space and 307 square feet of residential space.

A new library, a 500- to 800-seat performing arts center and a 18,000-square-foot public piazza between College Avenue and High Street are also planned.

"We're bringing life and excitement back to downtown," said borough Mayor Leo McCabe.

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