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By: Martin Daks

SPOTLIGHT Hudson County

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Beyond the **GOLD COAST**

Get to know Hudson County’s up-and-coming cities

For the past few years, the success of New Jersey’s Gold Coast — the waterfront stretch that includes Hoboken and Jersey City — has grabbed a lot of attention. But a host of other Hudson County cities are also making strides, according to some insiders.

“We’ve got members and others who are active in different parts of Hudson County,” said NAIOP New Jersey CEO Michael McGuinness. “There’s clearly a lot happening across the county, beyond hot areas like Jersey City and Hoboken.”

A range of development

He pointed to existing and new activity, including cities like Kearny — where Hugo Neu Corp. has been developing Kearny Point, a 130-acre light manufacturing, office, and entrepreneur space on the peninsula — and Harrison, where Russo Development previously put up Vermella Harrison, a 398-unit mixed-use development featuring approximately 12,000 square feet of retail space located adjacent to the Red Bull Arena and the Harrison PATH Station.

Other Harrison activity includes One Harrison, a joint venture of BNE Real Estate Group and Hornrock Properties that opened this summer. Made up of 256 residences ranging from studios to one- and two-bedroom layouts, and offering a shuttle service that lets residents easily access PATH train service, One Harrison also features more than 30,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor activities like a library with private meeting rooms, a 24-hour concierge, five lounge spaces, a two-level fitness studio and other amenities.

At the southern end of the county, Bayonne boasts activity like JMF Properties' two redevelopments on the site of the former Bayonne Military Ocean Terminal: Harbor View Marketplace, a commercial destination anchored by Costco and the multi-family residential Harbor Station South.

"In the past five years or so we've had a kind of renaissance of development in Bayonne, thanks in large part to the efforts of Mayor Jimmy Davis," said the city's business administrator Terrence Malloy. "Mayor Davis has actively pursued businesses, and has made effective use of tax agreements and other initiatives to let developers know that Bayonne is open for business."

Another project is "the one by Mahalaxmi Bayonne Urban Renewal," Malloy added, referring to a mixed-use project that recently got a go-ahead from the city's planning board. "Plans call for a 218-key hotel, about 4,500 residential units, and some 74,000 square feet of retail space."

A rebirth for Bayonne

Bayonne is a symbol of Hudson County's growth, said CPA-entrepreneur and BCB Bank President and CEO Thomas M. Coughlin. He acknowledges that the city hasn't received the attention that some other municipalities have garnered, but Coughlin thinks that's changing.

"For a time after World War II, Bayonne was booming with industry,"

the longtime resident recalled. "But then, big employers like Standard Oil [which since morphed into ExxonMobil] left, and the Military Ocean Terminal at Bayonne closed," in 1999.

Now, however, the shuttered terminal is being redeveloped as a commercial and residential hub — BCB provided a loan for the 150,000-square-foot Costco Wholesale that anchors the Harbor View Marketplace going up on the property — and the peninsula city is also leveraging its waterway access and taking other steps to attract businesses and individuals, according to Coughlin. In September his bank announced it had been named to the Sandler O'Neill Small Stars Class of 2019, a group of 30 publicly traded small-cap banks and thrifts that outperformed nearly 400 peers.

"The arrival of Costco [which opened earlier this year] was a big economic positive, since it's generating jobs and indicates that retailers see that Bayonne is a good investment," he said. "We were pleased to structure a loan for the project, because we also believe in the city."

In addition, other business-friendly efforts should further enhance the city's attraction to millennials and others who want the cache of New Jersey's Gold Coast, but are looking for more affordable, less densely populated housing, Coughlin said.

"As president of the Bayonne Chamber of Commerce, I've never seen so many ribbon-cutting ceremonies here," he noted. "BCB Bank is also making many loans to restaurants, boutique craft shops and other retail establishments that bring more people to the area. Another attraction, the planned ferry to Manhattan, will make it

easier for people to live here and work in New York, further enhancing the city's appeal."

Big, positive changes have also been occurring in Kearney, said Mayor Alberto G. Santos. In addition to mega-developments like Hugo Neu Corp.'s 2 million-square-foot, 130-acre Kearny Point, "Just look at 60 Passaic Ave.," he said, referring to a six-acre former baseball bat factory, which sat unused for some three decades until Russo Development purchased it with plans to build a 200-plus residential development on the site.

"We are seeing a notable amount of institutional investment coming into Kearny, and we are pleased to be part of the Passaic Avenue corridor resurgence," said Cushman & Wakefield investment sales specialist Robert Shapiro, when the project was announced in November 2018. "The redevelopment of the Bat Factory property will further enhance the area's growing reputation as a preferred live-play destination."

Santos also pointed to development along the Passaic River waterfront. "It was big for Harrison, and now it's big for Kearny, too," he said. "New retail and housing are going up where we used to have old industrial property in Kearny. BJ's Wholesale club opened a few years ago, and LA Fitness took over the former Pathmark site," at 175 Passaic Ave.

The municipality's location is also a big part of the attraction. "We've got convenient access to commuter rail, and we're close to downtown Newark," said Santos. "As urban living in general becomes more desirable, Kearny benefits from the demand. At the same time, we offer the safety, schools and space and overall quality of life that's characteristic of small towns."

An architect's angle on Hudson County

Jersey City and Hoboken draw attention because both cities "benefit from previous generations of investment in transit infrastructure and offer residents quick and convenient access to New York City via PATH service," said Steven Kratchman, owner and founder of Steven Kratchman Architect PC, who has been engaged in a variety of Hudson County projects. "Like New York City and Brooklyn, both cities also boast housing stock that fits into a traditional city street plan layout, which is complemented by open spaces for parks, waterfront access and public buildings."

Besides its proximity to Manhattan, Hudson County attractions include "a strong transportation network, affordable real estate, high-quality developments, stunning views of Manhattan and a strong existing site infrastructure," he added. "Young singles and couples, and growing families can afford two- to three-bedroom apartments in buildings with skyline views and a host of on-site amenities for a fraction of the cost of living in Manhattan, Hoboken and Jersey City."

Cities like Harrison that "offer 'one seat' transit rides to New York City will be the next development wave," according to Kratchman. "Also consider 'two-seat' commutes on existing light rail stops that are not located in Jersey City or Hoboken, such as Bayonne, West New York, Union City and Weehawken. These are the next set of towns and cities that will flourish. Long-term transit-oriented development will be related to light rail extensions to the south and north if these planned projects can be built out."