

PROGRESS

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Downtown's Not Dead

For Some City Businesses, Downtown Is Still The Place To Go



BUSY CORNER The corner of State and Ford Street was once known as Ogdensburg's "Busy Corner." Today, people like David Carbino and others still believe the city's downtown is the place to do business. (Mitchell Photo)

BY ALAIN ST. PIERRE
Not everyone has given up on Ogdensburg's downtown.

People like David Carbino, Jim Mee, Louis and Nancy Babbie believe that despite the problems the Ogdensburg-Charlestown Factory Outlet Mall is having, downtown is still a good place to open a business.

"I don't care where you're doing a business from," said Carbino. "If you let people know what you have for sale and you can back up what you sell, people will come to you."

Carbino runs a jewelry store in the building and also leases space to two tenants; Beneficial Finance and CJ's New Ventures.

Last summer, Carbino had the outside of his building renovated.

"At one point I considered putting apartments above the stores but changed my mind. So, I spent some money to close up the outside of the building. It's going to make the building warmer and it makes it more attractive," he said.

Jim Mee owns and operates CJ's. The store opened in December of 1985. At CJ's, Mee offers clients clothing and some sporting goods.

"This (the intersection of Ford and State Streets) used to be the Busy Corner. It was the place to go in Ogdensburg if you were looking to buy something," said Mee. "I guess the biggest reason we opened a store here was that we think the downtown is still a good place for people to shop."

"I mean, the mall may be having problems but you still have all the banks right here. That brings in daily traffic," he added.

Mee used to operate the Montgomery Wards store in the city. His store closed when Montgomery Wards went out of business.

Louis and Nancy Babbie are still waiting to make their mark on the city's downtown.

Last year, the Babbies bid on and bought the Surprise Store which has been vacant almost 10 years.

According to Nancy Babbie, the couple plans to restore the inside of the building to accommodate some small boutiques.

"We are also looking into setting up some apartments on the upper floors. It would be adult housing and we think we can make it a really nice place for people to live," she said.

Babbie and her husband moved

to Ogdensburg a year and half ago from Plattsburgh.

"After living here for a while, I began to think that a lot of people gave up on the downtown area and really they shouldn't have. It's just a question of plugging away at it until something develops."

"If you want something to happen to the downtown, you have to work on it. You just can't lay back and wait for someone else to take care of it," she added.

"Seeing things at the mall, the mall remains key to the development of downtown."

"I think the biggest mistake this city ever made was letting the state come in and build that mall. It was a fiasco from the day it started. If the downtown is going to be successful, the mall is going to have to attract a store that will generate some traffic."

"It needs something like a grocery store or a drug store to bring in the traffic. The mall has to create its own traffic and that will benefit all of downtown," he added.

Babbie suggested people might not be able to afford starting a new business in the mall because of high rental costs.

"Many people have told me that the rents charged at the mall are way too high. If that's true, it doesn't make much sense to me."

"It's tough enough just trying to start up a business and keeping it going. You don't need to pay extra money for rent. Maybe the mall owners need to give people a break when they first get going in the mall. Who knows, that might be all it takes," she added.

Mee said people are turned off by the mall's appearance.

"I don't like the visibility of the mall. You can't see the stores from the outside and people driving by can't tell what's going on inside. Besides, it doesn't look like a mall. I think that actively marketing the mall might help but other than that, I don't know what to say about the mall."

Mee said the city should begin paying more attention to the other downtown businesses than just worrying about what's going on at the mall.

"The mall isn't the only store in town," said Mee. "It would be nice if the city paid a little more attention to the rest of downtown. Maybe putting some money into sidewalks and snow removal could help."

But why would Babbie and her



DOWNTOWN BOOSTER — David Carbino put in a new facade on the corner of his building because he believes downtown is far from dead. (Mitchell Photo)



NEW LEASE ON LIFE? — Louis and Nancy Babbie hope to revive the old Surprise building, possibly with apartments and small boutiques.

husband want to take a chance on opening a business downtown? "Why not," she replied. "You never know if you can do something unless you try it. I can't see giving up on the downtown just because no one else wants to." "One thing though," she added. "We can't do it alone. We are going to need the community's support. There's definitely hope for the downtown."

OBPA Provides Homes To Host Of Firms

BY ALAIN ST. PIERRE

Last summer, the Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority focused its attention on the completion of its \$6.5 million expansion project at the city's port.

With the expanded facilities at the port, the OBPA had its finest year ever for handling cargo.

But what about business at the OBPA Light Industrial Park?

Despite some disappointments, plant managers in the park say 1986 was a good year to do business in Ogdensburg.

The company which showed the biggest gain in '86 was CompAs, a Canadian company based in Brockville, Ontario which located in the park four years ago.

By the end of 1986, CompAs was employing nearly 300 people, nearly 70 percent more people than were working at the end of 1985. The company was renting more than 30,000 square feet of space at the park.

"I would have to say that the outlook for CompAs in 1987 is cautiously optimistic," said CompAs General Manager Ed Gilbert. "We should experience some more growth in 1987 if business continues to go the way it has in the past year."

CompAs manufactures printed circuit assembly boards. The

What companies rent space from the OBPA? Here's a list:

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|-----------------------------|----------------|
| CompAs | A.N. Deringer |
| Mitel | Leslee Sports |
| C-Tech | Louet Sales |
| Filtran | Group Delta |
| F.W. Myers | Resin Sands |
| AEA Electronics | Interpro Sales |
| Lee Valley Tools | |
| Peace Bridge Brokerage | |
| Prescott Paper Products | |
| E.B. Eddy Forest Products | |
| Hurtsteel Products Ltd. | |
| Acco International | |
| Domtar Industries | |
| Morton Salt Company | |
| Vanderbilt Export Corp. | |
| Georgia Marble | |
| C. Itoh and Co. | |
| Pow Com Utilities | |
| Whittaker Clark and Daniels | |
| Bulldog Jordan | |
| Potsdam Paper | |
| Losurdo-Brunetto Creamery | |
| St. Joe Resources | |
| U.S. Air Force | |

boards are used in computer and telecommunications machinery.

Gilbert said a change in company philosophy is the main reason for CompAs' new growth.

"We used to be tied just to a few companies. We've expanded our customer base and that is the biggest reason we are a more stable

company now. If one company's business begins to slack off we don't feel it so badly. Our other customers are able to pick up the slack," he said.

"We serve customers in the northeastern U.S. Hopefully next year, our sales representatives will get a start breaking into the southeastern U.S. market," he added.

Other high-tech firms which manufacture products in the park include: Mitel, C-Tech, Filtran and AEA Electronics.

Mitel is in its 11th year of operations at the OBPA park. Plant Manager Eric Hunt described Mitel as a "Cinderella company."

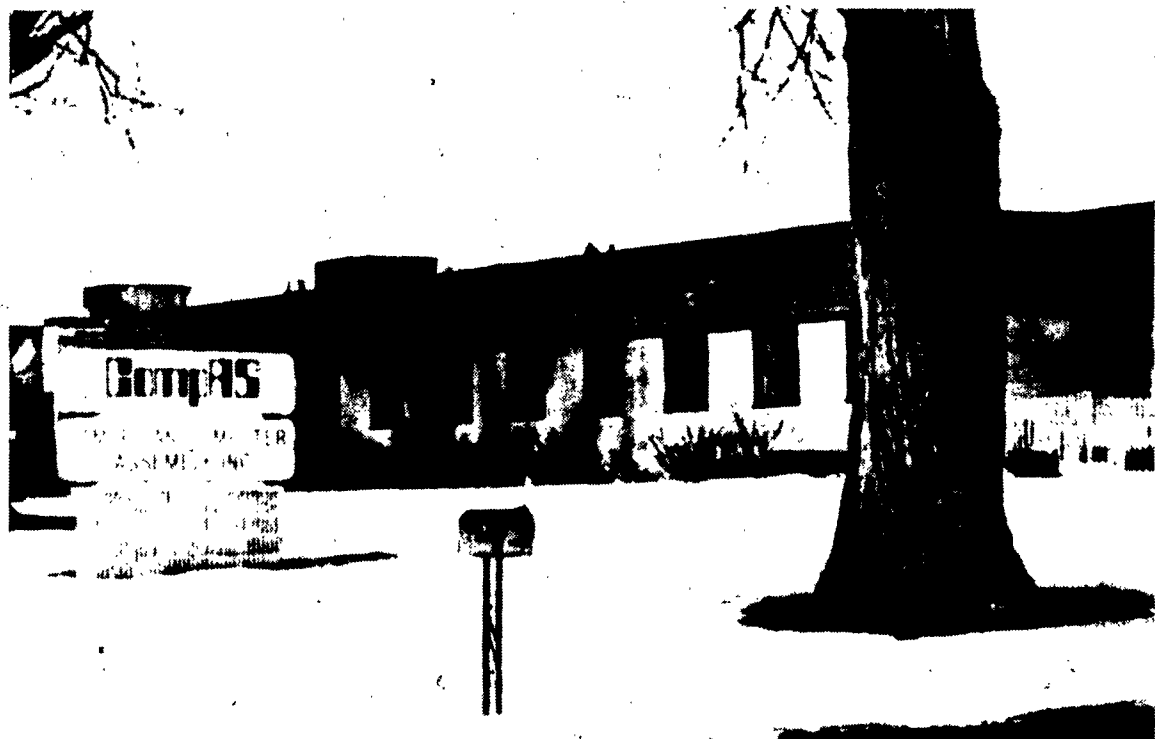
"We had a great beginning then we went through some hard times. Now," said Hunt who is Assistant Vice President of Manufacturing, "it looks like we are back on the road to recovery."

At its highpoint, Hunt said Mitel employed nearly 340 people.

Presently, the telephone equipment manufacturer employs about 108 people.

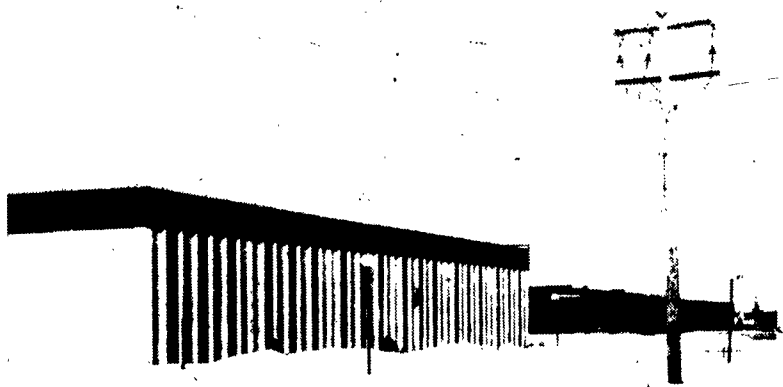
"We build the equipment then sell it to companies like NYNEX and other Bell operators. All that competition between the telephone companies really made last year a

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COMPAS — CompAs has emerged over the past few years as the single largest private employer in the Ogdensburg Bridge and Port

Authority's Industrial Park. (Mitchell Photo)



SMALL FIRMS — The OBPA provides numerous firms with incubator space in hopes that some day they'll need larger quarters. (Mitchell Photo)



COMMERCE PARK — While most people tend to think Commerce Park is the only location for businesses leasing space from the OBPA, the authority rents and leases space to tenants at the port, the authority's office building, and the airport. (Mitchell Photo)



AUTHORITY HQ — The Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority uses its headquarters building to provide office space to a host of fledgling firms and brokers. (Mitchell Photo)