



Midlink continues growth in Kalamazoo

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Gazette File

Midlink Business Park, shown here on Sprinkle Road, south of I-94 in Comstock Township

Although the economy has meant the team at **Midlink Business Park** has had to work harder and deals have been fewer and farther between in the past couple years, Midlink President David Smith doesn't want to use that as an excuse.

"With all that, we just figure we want to be successful, so we just do whatever we need to do to be successful," Smith said.

And the group has had many successes.

In the past 12 months, Midlink has leased 150,000 square feet in its east and west buildings, Smith said. The two buildings' combined occupancy is around 80 percent.

Midlink also **sold 10 acres to Ohio-based Seneca Medical Inc.**, which is constructing an 80,000-square-foot building on the property. **Southwest Michigan First** and **Bronson Healthcare Group** partnered with Midlink to secure that deal early this year, Smith said.

Also, the **Candlewood Suites** hotel on Sprinkle Road opened in October.

"So that's definitely a step in the right direction and a positive move for the project and for the intersection, for sure," Smith said.

The hotel has helped launch Midlink's retail development, he said.

"We're really working to be able to get more retail uses out front," Smith said. "Whether it's food service or service businesses, that's where we really need to show some success and get to the next level."

With 13 tenants in the park, those companies' employees need restaurants, banks, drycleaners and other services in close proximity, he said.

"We've got a lot of built-in business to go along with the great location on Sprinkle Road," Smith said of the retail area.

In addition to adding to the retail area in Midlink, achieving 100 percent occupancy in both the east and west buildings is one of Smith's goals. Midlink management has been doing operational improvements, such as painting and adding loading docks, to help attract tenants.

"As we continue to lease space, we want to make sure we have good, clean, functional space that's ready to go right away," Smith said.

Ted Vliek, an associate broker at **Signature Associates** who represents Midlink, is seeing some positive signs in terms of leasing.

"Our activity level is way up," he said. "We're getting a lot of calls."

And many of those calls are in the industrial sector, Vliek said.

"One of our marketing strategies is to reach out to manufacturing companies that could benefit from the Renaissance Tax zone," he said. "That's what we're kind of focusing on right now."

A goal further on the horizon — but still a priority — is finding users for the park's undeveloped land, Smith said.

Smith is grateful for the work of Comstock Township, Southwest Michigan First and the Michigan Economic Development Corp. when it comes to attracting businesses.

"That allows us to land deals like Kaiser (Aluminum) and things like that," Smith said. "There's been a lot of **talk about the tax incentives** and should we be incentivizing projects or are we just buying jobs? ... It's a slippery slope."

In today's environment, Michigan has to be aggressive and use incentives because every state is using them, Smith said. However, he knows a structural overhaul of the system needs to happen at some point.

"You want to support existing businesses that are already local, and you want to attract new (businesses), so you can't attract new at the expense of the existing," Smith said. "It's a complicated mix."

But he thinks there are many factors that make Kalamazoo attractive to businesses, including the Kalamazoo Promise, the efforts of Southwest Michigan First and other activity going on in the area. All that bodes well for the entire community, including Midlink, he said.

"I don't know if there's one single reason that you get a prospect, but it's the culmination of all the different strengths that we

have to offer as a community that really helps us be successful as a community and as a project," Smith said.

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