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BUILDING BLOCKS

AS220 unveils Mercantile Block, a home for artists.

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PBN PHOTO/RYAN T. CONATY

NO SUBSTITUTE: Alfred Hanson, foreground, president of SubChem Systems, with company engineer Scott Veitch and the REMUS-100. The latter is used for unattended underwater surveillance. SubChem designs payloads for the vehicle.

Powerhouse in oceanography turns 50

BY CHRIS BARRETT
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SubChem Systems Inc. President Alfred Hanson has what many small marine-research companies could only dream about: High-tech laboratories and a marine-sciences library a short walk away. At the end of the road, a dock hosts an advanced research vessel. Highly skilled people eager to discover the next breakthrough appear unsolicited at his door.

But for Hanson, the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography is as much a business partner as a landlord. And as the school commemorates GSO's 50th anniversary this month, the campus community is celebrating not just the degrees awarded and the papers written but also its ability to translate academia to real life.

"It's a remarkable place and great research is done here,"

SEE **URI**, PAGE 7

POLITICS

Twin River can wait on expansion

Push for ballot question in Nov. meets resistance

BY WILLIAM HAMILTON
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With Massachusetts leaders again considering casinos in the Bay State, the owners of Twin River say they're open to waiting another 1 1/2 years to put the question of casino gaming before Rhode Island voters.

A spokeswoman for the Lincoln video-slot parlor said the urgency remains to offer card and table games as quickly as possible to stave off competition from potential Massachusetts gaming facilities, but getting a casino question on a special ballot this November might not be the best option.

Twin River wants to "work with politicians on what the best course is," spokeswoman Patti Doyle said.

"It's being realistic," Doyle told Providence Business News last week. "We see there are some challenges [to seeking a ballot question this year], and we have to balance those challenges against the threat of Massachusetts, which we continue to think is real."

Those "challenges" include reluctance on the part of Gov. Lincoln D. Chafee and others to hold a special election in November for voters statewide to decide whether table games should be

SEE **TWIN RIVER**, PAGE 22

Historic tax-credit supporters press for its revival

BY CHRIS BARRETT
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The Pawtucket Citizens Development Corp. is chomping at the bit to redevelop the long-vacant Old Colony Bank on Main Street as part of a larger affordable housing project. The nonprofit organization, however, needs financing and wants the state to help by reviving a once-popular, and costly, tax credit.

Earlier this month, Andrew Pierson, a

real estate associate at the organization, joined other developers at a hearing to urge lawmakers to bring back the state Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit. "The historic tax credits would really, really strengthen our ability to make the project work," Pierson said later in an interview.

A House bill would create a program similar to the one eliminated in 2007. The House Finance Committee held the legis-

lation for further study, which could kill its chances for further consideration this year. But the hearing opened a discussion occurring in state capitols around the country, as lawmakers struggle with tight budgets in a down economy.

In some places, like Michigan, lawmakers are scrapping or scaling down the credits as they search high and low to cut costs. In other states, like Minnesota, governors are signing the programs into

law, extolling their potential to spark economic development and create jobs. At least 30 states now have some form of a historic tax-credit program.

The conflicting moves have Renee Kuhlman scratching her head. The director of special projects at the National Trust for Historic Preservation has been hard-pressed to identify a trend or explain why neighboring states will

SEE **TAX CREDIT**, PAGE 22

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MAIN STREET

Firm spreading signs of success. **PAGE 8**

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URI

FROM PAGE ONE

Dean David Farmer said. "It's one of those jewels in the Rhode Island crown."

Since the school's founding in 1961, affiliated faculty have gone on to found companies, leverage tens of millions in federal and state research dollars, trained countless scientists, graduated 800, mapped the waters off Rhode Island's coast and catapulted the school into the national spotlight.

"Any oceanographer in the world knows GSO," said Deborah Bronk, president of the American Society of Limnology and Oceanography and a professor of physical sciences at the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

The school hardly started that way. When the university established the school in 1961, the field of oceanography could be called "emerging," at best. Just one place in the country - Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego - awarded doctorates in the field. URI admitted fewer than 20 students to its first oceanography class. The school's first dean, John Knauss, secured a moth-balled Navy freighter, the Trident, for \$500, sailed it through the Panama Canal and converted it to a research ship.

Today, the school overlooking Narragansett Bay enrolls about 85 students, employs 33 faculty, 19 researchers and some 50 staff. It has built an Inner Space Center commanded by Titanic discoverer Robert Ballard, new laboratories brimming with researchers, a library that serves as the official depository for the National Sea Grant program and a Coastal Resources Center.

The campus dock hosts the National

Science Foundation research vessel the Endeavor that sails the world with scientists from URI and elsewhere onboard.

Hanson, a researcher at the school as well as an entrepreneur, calls the 200-acre campus a watershed of opportunity.

He earned his doctorate in chemical oceanography at the university and built a research portfolio as a scientist at the Narragansett Bay Campus. The college's water tanks provided him places to conduct some of his first experiments. And in 2000 the state-funded Slater Center for Ocean Technology, then located at the bay campus, awarded SubChem an \$82,750 grant that Hanson said jump-started the company.

Today, he employs about six people, many of them associated with the university. He rents the college's boats to conduct experiments. And he sees potential customers all the time as they pass through to visit other researchers at the campus.

"It's the selling point to be physically and collaboratively associated with the university's bay campus," he said. "People come here to visit and I'm smack dab in the middle of a larger institution."

Dean Farmer can tick off a number of companies spawned by the institution. Professor Peter Cornillon developed an innovative approach for exchanging massive amounts of data and started **Open-dap**. Professors Isaac Ginis and Lawrence Rothstein gained international acclaim for hurricane-prediction modeling and sold a startup to a large insurance firm. And professor Malcolm Spaulding, along with a team of URI scientists, would

start research juggernaut **Applied Science Associates**, now based in South Kingstown.

The school has also been a magnet for outside research. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration maintains a fisheries laboratory adjacent to the bay campus. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency operates a post next to campus that hosts its Atlantic Ecology Division.

On the URI campus itself, nearly 80 percent of the school's \$40 million budget comes from research grants. School faculty are quick to note that their \$32 million in research grants represents about half of the entire university's sponsored research money.

"They're really the 800-pound guerilla of research," oceanography professor Bradley Moran said of GSO.

To foster that research and cross-collaboration, the school keeps no departments that are typical of university bureaucracy. The campus encourages team projects, such as the ocean Special Area Management Plan, which brought together professors from varying fields to study the waters off Rhode Island and their potential for renewable energy development.

To celebrate April 1, it hosts the Harpoon Seminar that brings the campus community together to discuss the best fictional research projects but also to foster real relationships.

This year, the school is putting together a forum coordinated by Moran to work with local companies to better understand how the school can translate its research into commercial applications.

"The opportunity here is to promote GSO on a much greater scale," Moran said.

The school already hosts the Center of Excellence in Undersea Technology. The partnership among the university, federal government and private corporations aims to train the next generation of technologists on the development and evaluation of undersea national-defense technologies. Pierre Corriveau, chief technology officer at the **Naval Undersea War Center** in Newport, said the center and the relationships the Navy has built with GSO are invaluable.

"When our researchers recognize that they need a world-renowned scientist in a particular area, they'll actually pay the \$4 and go across the [Newport] bridge," he said.

For his part, Farmer - who departs this year after a decade as dean - said the school is nowhere near reaching its full potential. For much of its history, the school has focused on solving basic scientific problems.

That, however, is starting to change. The Special Area Management Plan delivered last year went far beyond basic research. The school is still working to fully leverage its 41,000-square-foot Inner Space Center, which brims with technology connecting scientists and university students on land with deep-sea research expeditions around the world. In 2009, NOAA announced it would home-port the advanced-research vessel *Okeanos Explorer* at **Quonset Business Park**, to provide the ship easy access to the center. The school is also working to secure a replacement for the 35-year-old Endeavor.

"Our full potential is just emerging," Farmer said. ■

'Any oceanographer in the world knows GSO.'

DEBORAH BRONK

American Society of Limnology and Oceanography president

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