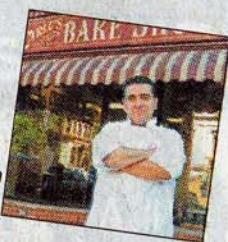




WARWICK BEACON

Sweet Tips from the Cake Boss

Expert advice from Buddy Valastro. Turn to **FOOD - PAGE 26**

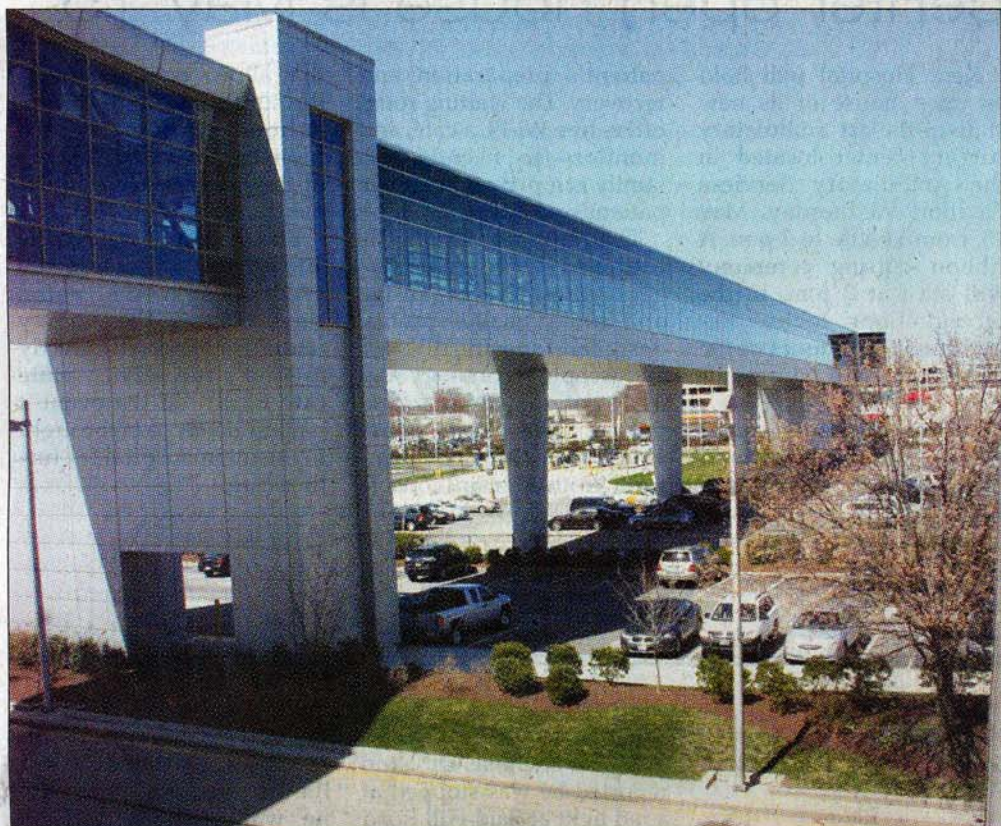


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DISTRICT SPINE: The Interlink is considered a unifying component of the station district that reaches west from in front of the airport terminal. (Warwick Beacon photo)

Marketing the Station District

Public asked to help rename core area

By JOHN HOWELL

What's in a name?

John Riendeau, director of business development at the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, says a name is critical, especially when it comes to selling and branding a place.

And it is evident that the Warwick Station Development District hasn't generated the buzz for the substantial investment the state and federal governments have put into Green Airport, the Interlink and a railroad station. The most pronounced development

in the district, the Hilton Garden Inn, came when the Interlink was still a dream. Since then there have been plans, most notably the proposal of Michael D'Ambra to convert the eight acres occupied by his construction business and asphalt plant into an office park and hotel. D'Ambra has gained city approval for the project, but the market isn't there yet.

The city and the state aim to change all of that and part of making it happen is the right name.

■ Name

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"We are looking to give it [the district] a new name that resonates locally and nationally ... even internationally," said Riendeau.

That's why the state and the city are asking Warwick residents and businesses to take an online survey and help come up with a name for the district. They will also conduct two meetings next week to outline plans for the district and solicit input. The first of the meetings is April 22 from 3 to 4:30 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn for property owners within the 90-acre district. That will be followed with a public meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Buttonwood Community Center.

City Planner William DePasquale said the process has progressed beyond the planning and regulatory phases for the district and that the focus is being turned to giving the area an identity and marketing it.

Developed by the public relations firm (add)Ventures, the online survey gives an overview of the district and proposed plans for its development and then offers a number of words that could be used to describe it, asking for the respondent to select three. It goes on to ask whether the name should be linked to Hillsgrove, as the area was called for the mill that was once its economic center, or to Warwick and whether it should convey a historical, new or exciting feeling. The survey also suggests 18 possible names running from Warwick Landing to The Grove and City Center Warwick.

More than two-dozen representatives have already taken the survey from the Central Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce, the

City Council and the hospitality sector with the names "Centre" (in the English manner) and "Hillsgrove" being favored.

The branding is just part of the picture, says DePasquale. He said that, since Governor Lincoln Chafee and Mayor Scott Avedisian announced in January the award of contracts to the BETA Group of Lincoln, a lot of work has gone into "market segmentation." He explained this is an effort to identify what businesses would be interested in the district.

"It takes the shotgun approach away from it," he said, "and it is more refined than casting a wide net."

Riendeau said a market analysis report will be finalized this Friday that will identify market demand and "this is the type of real estate we need to chase."

The district calls for multi-uses, including residential, commercial and offices. Riendeau calls it "unique," pointing out that, with connections to Route 95, the airport and rail service, it has a lot to offer.

The question, he said, "is who is going to be that anchor tenant?" In addition, he asks, how will the district be developed to its optimum potential?

In his remarks in January, Gov. Chafee called the district with the airport, Interlink and station, "one of the state's key infrastructure and transit-oriented economic centers."

The survey and the work leading up to it as well as the marketing plan that will follow is being funded with a \$400,000 Transportation Community System Preservation grant from the Federal Highway Administration.

The survey can be found on the Warwick Beacon website: www.warwickonline.com. It will also be posted to the city website: www.warwickri.gov.

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