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Fabiano Brothers beer and liquor distribution center nearly complete

BY ERIC ENGLISH

Bay County has a bright spot in an otherwise bleak landscape for commercial construction in Michigan.

Work is streaming along on a new \$16 million beer and liquor distribution center along US-10 in Monitor Township, four miles west of Bay City. The giant new facility will be operated by Mount Pleasant-based wholesaler Fabiano Brothers Inc.

"We have 60 to 80 trades people on the site each day," said Brad Laackman, construction manager for CSM Group, a Grand Rapids contractor overseeing the project.

"We are on schedule and we are doing really good," Laackman said during a Nov. 12 site tour.

Construction of the 191,000-square-foot facility is about 80 percent complete and the first of some 300 Fabiano employees now working in other offices will occupy the building in December.

The building will house corporate offices, sales and training centers and warehousing and distribution of beverages. The building features a glass-and-brick facade facing US-10 that softens the appearance of the shipping facility behind it.

"We really wanted to build something the community can be proud of. We didn't want to just put up a big box or a warehouse," said James C. Fabiano II, a partner-owner of Fabiano Brothers.

The company hopes the building will anchor a corporate "marketplace" of other commercial development on the 71-acre property some day. Fabiano said lots are for sale, but he still is searching for buyers.

"I'm in the process of trying to land some people," he said. "I'm chasing leads trying to sell out the park."

For now, his task isn't likely to be an easy one.

Commercial construction activity in Michigan is grinding to a virtual standstill as the state's and nation's economy worsens, according to Damian P. Hill, a spokesman for the trade group Associated General Contractors of Michigan.



Construction is underway on a beer and wine distribution center, to be run by Fabiano Brothers Inc



Construction of a beer and wine distribution center in Bay County is about 80 percent complete.

"There's not a lot of work going on, and it's not just up your way," Hill said. "Unfortunately, it's kind of a perfect storm."



James Fabiano II

The group estimates that commercial construction activity nationwide declined about 3 percent from September to October, and 11 percent compared to a year ago.

Laackman said trade workers finishing the Fabiano center also are working on the \$1 billion expansion of Hemlock Semiconductor Corp. in Saginaw County.

"A lot of the contractors are on both jobs, but it hasn't pulled workers away from either one," he said.

Material costs for the Fabiano building were kept in check by bidding the work in 2007 at set prices, Laackman said.

Most of the concrete and structural work is completed. Now, offices are being finished in wood paneling and stone, including a hospitality area that will include a "training bar" for product demonstration and education.

A special system for shelving inventory will be installed in the warehouse areas, which measure 360 feet in length, or more than a football field.

Fabiano said the new facility will improve efficiency and help Fabiano Brothers Inc. to continue growing.

"We hope to wrap it up by year's end," he said. "Hopefully, we'll have our occupancy permit in December."