



Contributors

Edward Cooney: Looking to Quonset's success

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RHODE ISLAND has a great opportunity to speed its economic growth and the creation of good locations for new businesses and jobs. That opportunity is at Quonset Point. Over the past four years, the team at the Quonset Development Corporation (QDC) has laid a strong foundation to build a premier business park. Now Saul Kaplan, executive director of the state Economic Development Corporation (EDC), is calling for an even greater focus on Quonset.

We are, he has said, on the "threshold of accelerated growth." Mr. Kaplan correctly notes that to move forward, all of the key stakeholders need to form strategic collaborations. By strengthening relationships among the QDC, the Town of North Kingstown, businesses and state officials, we will be both collectively and individually able to reap the benefits of economic growth there.

Rhode Islanders face a \$300 million state budget deficit next year, while North Kingstown is challenged by mandatory caps on the property-tax levy and a heavy local tax burden on our residents. Already an impressive 8,000 people work at Quonset every day, but we need that number to grow. It is anticipated that at full build-out the park can provide opportunities for 18,000 jobs. Given these issues, it is crucial that all Quonset stakeholders put their differences aside — political or otherwise — and provide the leadership it will take to make good things happen at QDC.

For years Rhode Island has been striving to find the best use of Quonset Point. And while there have been some strains, we have made significant progress. Now we must recommit to taking full advantage of Quonset's opportunities.

The foundation has been laid. When Rhode Islanders authorized a \$48 million bond issue for Quonset in 2004, we signaled a willingness to invest in the business park's future and to encourage growth and development. During Geoffrey Grout's tenure as CEO of the QDC, much work was done laying the groundwork for future success. Since 2003, the value of a parcel of developable commercial land at Quonset has doubled, rising from \$100,000 to \$200,000. Quonset now hosts over 150 businesses, employing 8,000 workers. Private developers have invested about \$175 million into Quonset.

For North Kingstown, a growing Quonset means more revenue to help pay for education, public safety, recreation and all the other things that make North Kingstown a great place to live. The park and the businesses there already generate about \$4.6 million in annual revenue for North Kingstown. That's a big number. It could go up, but to do that, we need to move forward. I welcome Mr. Kaplan's fresh focus on building relationships with key stakeholders. It represents an opportunity for North Kingstown to leave

history behind and join with Quonset in creating jobs, revenue and opportunity for our town and our state.

We've already gotten some return on our investment at Quonset. But we can do much, much more. The future of Quonset is bright, but the work will not be done for us. I'm looking forward to working with the new leadership at Quonset to realize the full potential of the park to benefit our state and our town.

Edward J. Cooney is president of the North Kingstown Town Council. The opinions expressed here are his own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Town Council.