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Article published Jun 24, 2006

## IP gives way to biofuel

By JIM MARTIN

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### Construction starts on new \$46 million plant at dormant eastside site

Nearly five years after International Paper Co. announced it would leave Erie, work crews are moving away old foundation stones to make way for new ones.

The work that began this week is the first step toward building a \$46 million biofuel plant at the former IP plant site.

"It's the start of the biggest industrial project that has hit Erie in a long time," said Monica Brower, chief executive of the Greater Erie Industrial Development Corp. "This is the first piece. You are going to see constant activity in one part (of the site) or another for the next five years."

Crews from Chivers Construction Co. are working 24 hours a day to move away old bricks and cement so Erie Management Group can meet a mid-July deadline to start what is expected to be a 15-month construction project for Lake Erie Biofuels.

Brower acknowledged not everyone is happy about the round-the-clock clanking of heavy equipment and the constant growl of diesel engines.

"We ask for patience from the neighborhood as we work hard to complete this phase of the redevelopment," she said.

This is only the first of numerous companies that Erie Management Group plans to locate on the site, but Brower doesn't expect there to be a need again to work day and night.

Brower said she's sympathetic to the concerns of neighbors, but she's also happy to see the \$1.4 million cleanup and grading project begin.

"To see it starting is a big relief and the start of even bigger things," she said.

The biofuel plant, which is expected to produce 45 million gallons of diesel fuel or more a year from sources as varied as palm oil and beef fat, is expected to employ about 30 people, a tiny fraction of the number who once worked at IP.

Brower stressed, however, that this is just the beginning of a series of projects planned by Erie Management Group.

There's nothing theoretical about the rest of the plan, said Stan Shumway, president of EMG. His company has committed to locating a number of companies on the site, some of which are already operating in other locations.

They've also given their word that EMG will provide at least 297 jobs on the site by 2008.

"The short answer is some of it's already happening," Shumway said, referring in part to a wood preservative company already operating in Erie. "These companies are there. You can reach out and touch them."

There's also the potential for some spinoff employment.

Shumway noted, for instance, the possibility of trucking jobs associated with shipping fuel from the plant.

Given that the community has heard more promises than seen action, Brower understands that some might be reluctant to believe a piece of good news.

She said this is one plan even the most doubtful should believe in.

"We are confident it's all going to happen," Brower said. "Erie Management has followed through on every promise they have made. I think it's going to be better than we expected. It has the potential to change and diversify our economy."

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### **Who's coming?**

Erie Management Group plans to locate the following companies on the former International Paper Co. site:

- Lake Erie Biofuels
- Biopreserve, a wood preservative plant
- Griffin Analytics, a tech company
- CFL Inc., a ship management company
- Sweetwater Asset Management
- Westwind Financial Partners
- International Business Linkages

Last changed: Jun 24, 2006

