Data from drones

A research project using drones is designed to prevent dangerous falls for roof inspectors, improve the accuracy of damage assessments and reduce fraud brought by faulty insurance claims.

The project is a partnership of the Property Drone Consortium, or PDC, and Rochester Institute of Technology to assess the usefulness of various unmanned aerial systems and a variety of sensors for up-close property inspections.

By LORI GAME

Perinton project to open

$22M development to have apartments, retail

By ANDREA McKEE

Whitey Town Center, a $22 million mixed-use development in Perinton on Whitney Road, is slated to open this fall.

Developers and town leaders hope the project near Fairport will lead to additional growth in the area.

The 18-acre site will feature a 28,500-square-foot building for retail and professional office use.

Behind that will be the Legends at Whitney Center, an independent senior living apartment complex comprising three buildings totaling 151 apartments for those 55 and older.

The retail segment is slated to open in

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Jury grants award to an ex-associate

By WILL ASTOR

A state court jury has awarded a six-figure sum to a former associate in Nixon Peabody LLP’s Rochester office who accused the firm of giving him short shrift on a promised bonus.

After leaving Nixon Peabody in 2008 to accept a post with Eastman Kodak Co., Noah Doolittle sued the firm in 2009, claiming it came up $190,000 short of what was supposed to have been a $265,000 bonus.

Reaching a verdict June 20 at the conclusion of trial before state Supreme Court Commercial Division Justice Matthew Rosenbaum, a jury found in Doolittle’s favor, granting him a $265,926 award.

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Food for thought at East

Teaching garden connects firms, culinary students and heart health effort

By KERRY FALHIER

Dixon Schwabl Inc., SWBR Architects & Engineers P.C. and Broccoli Tree and Lawn Care Inc. have teamed up with the American Heart Association of Rochester to support East High School in the creation of a teaching garden.

The initiative is in direct support of the American Heart Association’s mission to increase overall heart health.

Volunteers, including employees of the organizations, took part in the groundbreaking of the garden on July 9. The planting day is slated for July 28.

The garden is located in the center of East High School and is some 2,050 square feet.

“[The garden] is a way to build community, connection and resilience,” said Lauren Dixon, CEO of Dixon Schwabl. “It’s a great way to bring people together to start conversations, help connect and make people feel good about themselves. It’s a way to start working with others and see how we can make a difference in the community.”

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Reforms would change rules at COMIDA

By ANNE SAUSDIES

As the County of Monroe Industrial Development Agency seeks to move beyond the controversy involving the 1-Square development in Irondequoit, new reforms have been proposed to improve the seven-member board’s functioning and transparency.

Also on the table is a proposal to increase the number of new jobs required as a condition of getting COMIDA assistance. County Executive Cheryl Dinolfo is proposing that any business receiving benefits of more than $1 million be required to provide a 20 percent increase in jobs, up from 10 percent now.

That requirement, if in place at the time, could have ruled out a project in

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used in UAS, commonly known as drones, to more easily and precisely capture data that can then be processed through manned photography.

The consortium is a collaboration of insurance carriers, construction industries, and lenders, supporting enterprises, and industry leaders. Members include Allstate Corp., Liberty Specialty Markets, Insurance Technologies Corporation, and EagleView Technologies Inc., which merged in 2013 with Pictometry International Corp., a Hemeretta-based aerial measurement company.

The idea to partner with RIT, the only university in the consortium, came out of the No. 1 risk the consortium identifies with using traditional manned photography to assess roof damage for the insurance industry following storms. "There are 800,000 claims around the U.S. every year from hail and storm damage. There’s a lot of risk of falls from walking on a roof," said Charles Modell, president of the consortium. "We can minimize that risk by using drones instead of ladders.

Drones also have a level of access to a roof that cannot be achieved by manned inspection. As a result, the consortium was able to detect subtle storm damage that could lead to leaks or other problems.

"From a proof of view, there is a much more accurate assessment with drones," said Carl Salvaggio, professor of the Photonics Carlson Center for Imaging Sciences at RIT. "Manned photography is a tedious process prone to mistakes. We can improve the quality of the assessment and the accuracy of the claim, which will save money for the insurance companies."

Within the past year, the consortium secured FAA regulatory approvals to permit the use of a variety of UAS platforms for aerial data collection, including the inspection of properties for the insurance and construction industries. "It makes it easier for commercial use of the drones," said John Monaco, manager of market research and planning at Pictometry. "There’s less reporting requirements."

While there are clear benefits to using unmanned aircraft to photograph rooftops, some point to the drawbacks, specifically the infringement on privacy that can happen when photographing homes in close proximity.

"When you are on a rooftop you are going to catch a glimpse of a neighbor’s backyard," Salvaggio said, noting a recent complaint a Pittsford resident had with a test project.

"We’re trying to research ways to blur imagery of faces before we even download it. We’re trying to do things on the aircraft before the imagery is acquired. We’re working with our cybersecurity team."

Projects, such as the one with the consortium, are part of growing research at RIT with drones.

The recently named unmanned aerial vehicles as a signature research initiative at the university. Interdisciplinary projects based in the Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science, will receive $1 million over the next five years to address challenges facing this industry from integrating UAVs into the national airspace to making use of data collected with sensors that record visual, spectral, thermal and geometric information with very high spatial resolution.

"The FDC will benefit from a lot of this work indirectly, as many of the problems that we have been able to work on with the RIT funding will help solve problems in collecting data for RIT research projects, as well as other projects," Salvaggio said.

"The USAS platform and sensors that the RIT funding allowed us to acquire, allows us to do the work that we are doing for the FDC. Without it, we would not have been able to enter into this research agreement that we have with them."

Replacing manual roof inspections with enhanced UAVs could lead to reduced costs for insurers, making the FDC and the research the center of attention.

"The property insurance FDC could be a natural use to a lot of policies, including those for businesses, the homeowners market and other areas," said Monaco. "We can use that understanding to develop products that help in those areas. It can help us to look at the economy and safety benefits to our thousands of government and commercial customers, as well as allow us to develop new customers.

COMDA
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2015 that was slated to add 112 new jobs. Bausch & Lomb Inc. that year was approved for $3.7 million to support the development of four high-speed contact lens manufacturing lines. But the addition of 112 jobs to an existing workforce of 180 is just under 14 percent job growth and would have failed to meet the proposed 20 percent benchmark, though Bausch & Lomb said this was not a concern for the project.

The higher percentage also would have affected the Culver Road Armor project by an additional 16 jobs projected on top of 67 existing jobs, and the Pictometry International Inc. headquarters project in 2014 with 20 additional jobs on top of 198 pre-existing. Neither of those projections would have hit the 20 percent mark, and both of those projects topped $1 million in benefits, triggering the job creation requirement.

These are not the typical projects COMDA approves. Over the past three years, the number of projects receiving benefits over $1 million varied from eight in 2013 to only two in 2014 and 16 in 2015.

"The lawyer Michael Townsend said he would like to see some research done into past beneficiaries and the potential of raising the job creation requirement to 20 percent before the board moves forward with this idea.

"That’s just my personal opinion," he added.

Many of the other projects that have been approved as COMDA projects as LLCs and easily could meet any percentage target by adding a single job since they typically start from zero, which

raises a question about the meaningfulness of the job creation measure.

Dinoallo did not return requests for comment on her proposals released on July 13.

Ann Burr, the new COMDA chairwoman, who was credited by Dinoallo as having worked with her on the recommendations, said increasing the job creation requirement reflects the board’s and the county executive’s commitment to growing jobs in Monroe County.

Other changes proposed by Dinoallo that would affect COMDA board members, many of whom are recent additions.

Dinoallo has called for annual training for board members and new training for incoming board members.

Her recommendations also call for posting all agreements and payouts-in-loos-of-taxes deals on the COMDA website as well as amending the agency’s bylaws to ensure information on any matter going before the board is distributed at least a week in advance of a meeting, unless it is determined to be kept by the board.

"The changes will be helpful as we work to provide more transparency and open communication," Burr said.

Monroe County Legislator Minority Leader Cynthia Kalish, D-Rochester, released a different set of recommendations this week, arguing Dinoallo’s proposals did not go far enough to "address the undue political influence her administration exerted on what should be an independent agency focused on economic development."

Kalish’s proposed reforms include barring county employees from entering a job with a company they worked with on a COMDA contract for two years after leaving county service. It would bar COMDA board members from having any business contracts with the county. Her recommendations also call for adopting a law prohibiting the disclosure of proprietary business information for non-governmental purposes and establishing penalties for the misuse of insider information.

Finally, Kalish said the executive director of COMDA should not be a county employee but a COMDA employee and an independent director; and COMDA board members, through her said proposals will be introduced at next month’s county legislature meeting.

The recommendations of Kalish and Dinoallo come not long after former COMDA chairwoman Theresa May stated she would not seek re-election for another term limits for board members, though she did not indicate a length. Her recommendations call for posting all agreements and payouts-in-loos-of-taxes deals on the COMDA website as well as amending the agency’s bylaws to ensure information on any matter going before the board is distributed at least a week in advance of a meeting, unless it is determined to be kept by the board.

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work for law firms across the country was waning at that point because of the economy," Doolittle told the jury.

In a ruling handed down in March 2015, however, a 4th Department Appellate panel reversed the dismissals, sending the matter back to the lower court. Given the conflicting evidence and testimony, the judge incorrectly perceived the case as merely a dispute over the collection points and how it was presented to (Wixom’s) employees,...summary judgment was inappropriate," the appellate panel wrote.

The 4th Department ruling would make the success of Wixom’s bid to void the jury verdict highly unlikely, Thomas predicted.

most of Doolittle’s claims. Had those dismissals stood, his client would have lost the case, Thomas said.

The judge said he would interview this week.

"The judge, still referred to the case as bleak 2008 economic picture as justification for withholding bonus payouts. "At that time, as many as we remember, the economy was really struggling, and the firm was taking some actions with regard to its own finances, and, again, fell into its discretion that we could not award any collection bonuses that year, that it just wasn’t in the budget," he told the jury.

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