

Weber breaks ground on Huntley distribution center

Jeanie Mayer For Sun-Times Media

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HUNTLEY — Under azure skies and with the sound of earth-moving machines roaring in the distance, nearly 100 people gathered on Friday to witness the turning of the first shovels of dirt at the site where Weber-Stephen's planned 757,000 square foot distribution center will be located.

Weber-Stephen's partner in the project, Duke Realty, purchased the 113-acre site and annexed it into the village earlier this year.

The guest list for the invitation-only event read like a who's-who of Illinois government that included Governor Pat Quinn, Representative Mike Tryon, Congressman Randy Hultgren, Senator Pamela Althoff, and Kristi Lafleur, executive director of the Illinois State Tollway Authority.

Ryan O'Leary, Vice President of leasing and development for Duke, opened the ceremony by thanking the groups and governing bodies that helped make the project a reality in a short period of time. O'Leary also provided some perspective on how large this global distribution center will be.



Governor Pat Quinn (raised shovel) and Village President Charles Sass (white shirt) turn over the first shovel of dirt with representatives of Duke Realty and Weber Stephen (Jeanie Mayer for Sun-Times Media)

"This distribution center will be as large as 13½ football fields, and we can expand it by 400,000 square feet more. We will be able to house 4.5 million Weber kettle grills, two million kettles will be shipped from this center every year to 72 countries around the world. We will move 450 tons of earth, use 2,282 tons of steel in the building and hire 130 personnel to construct the facility," O'Leary said.

Among the agencies involved in providing incentives to Weber-Stephen were the Quinn Administration that provided Weber with an incentive package worth \$4 million over ten years as a credit against the company's income tax liability and Community Unit School District 300 who offered a fifty percent tax abatement for five years.

"The District helped partner with the village of Huntley to provide tax incentives to complete this project," said Susan Harkin, School District 300 CFO. We agreed to a five-year tax abatement where the school district will receive

Weber Grill Huntley

Scheduled Opening: 2015

New Dist. Jobs: 100

New Mfg. Jobs: 475

50 percent of the expected tax revenues for the district. Of course we are interested in working together to keep a company like Weber here in the village.”

Village President Charles Sass presented Weber-Stephens with a certificate of recognition for the project that went from preliminary plan to final approval in just over 6 months.

“We met with Weber’s development team for the first time in January of this year and were told they wanted to move dirt by May. It seemed like a monumental task because the property was not even annexed to the village yet,” Sass said.

Weber’s new \$26 million center will enable the company to consolidate the distribution locations that are in Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania and Nevada. Sass credited the \$59 million tollway interchange project that was completed at Huntley’s I-90 last year for enabling the village to be selected over the other states being considered for this center.

“Weber has a 20 year history in Huntley and we are excited to grow with them. This is what we expected to see when we worked for the I-90 Interchange project,” Sass said.

Illinois Governor Pat Quinn spoke at the event as well commending Weber-Stephen for reaching out globally with their products.

“Here we have a company that understands how important is to



Village President Charles Sass speaks to a crowd of nearly 100 people at the Weber-Stephen groundbreaking ceremony. (Jeanie Mayer for Sun Times Media)

put together a product for the world,” Quinn said.

James Stephen, Executive Chairman of Weber-Stephen, gave a little history on the company and on his father, George Stephen, who invented the now famous kettle grill in the 1950s and formed the barbecue division of Weber Brothers factory in Chicago. By the late '50s, George bought out the company and later changed the name to Weber-Stephen. His son, James Stephen, worked in the family business and in 1976 began his career in sales and then manufacturing. He led the team that invented Weber’s Genesis gas grill in the 1980s. In 1992, Stephen became CEO of the company and in 2013, he became Executive Chairman.

“Every type of Weber grill is manufactured in Illinois, except for one. This facility represents global growth. We are pleased to be in Huntley because this is our home. Our goal is to make Weber a household name in every language around the world,” Stephen said.