

Business, jobs, growing on Mare Island



The conceptual rendering for Mare Island Building 45 that is being renovated. Building 45 is one of the island's oldest structures, located north of the Mare Island Museum in the Historic Core and less than one block from the future ferry terminal. Courtesy of Lennar Mare Island

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The people who live and/or work on Mare Island will have a market/deli before long, if Lennar Mare Island officials have their way, a spokesman said Tuesday.

The number of people working on the island is growing, with 50 new full-time jobs added in the first half of 2015, according to LMI's June 2015 jobs survey.

There are now more than 2,400 jobs on Mare Island, with 105 businesses occupying more than 3.6 million square feet of space, spokesman Ed Moser said.
"We are currently marketing a retail space for lease on "G" Street,

right near the entrance to the island, as a market/deli space,” he said. “We’ve had a number of proposals for that space and we hope to have something soon. We’re looking for the right fit.”

There is no telling how long that might take, however, he said. Though the lion’s share of the island’s job growth results from the expansion of existing businesses, there are also a number of new ones. Twila Nixon’s *Vino Godfather*, is one of those.

“It’s a wine brand,” the Vallejo native said. “The name came from my friend who used it for his emails, and it seemed to fit.”

Nixon says she’s operated a Napa winery for three years and is working on opening a tasting room in one of the officer mansions on Mare Island.

“I picked Vallejo because I was born and raised here,” she said. “Back in the day it was a thriving city, with the perfect, mellow climate, and there is no wine tasting place here.”

There is the Mare Island Brewery, which, Nixon notes, carries her product. That includes a line of prohibition-themed red and white wines Nixon said.

“The whole idea is to be the first one here,” she said. “Vallejo’s got the water, the climate, the ferry, the growing art scene downtown, everything. It’s a hop, skip and a jump to the Napa Valley, San Francisco and Sacramento.”

Nixon said she hopes to get all her permits in order within the next few months and be open for business.

Already open for business — for the last month and an half — is the Veterans Resource Center of America, at 1000 Azuar Drive.

Executive Director Marc Deal, who said he’s been with the agency five years, said the Mare Island office of the 40-plus-year-old nonprofit, is focusing on homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing for homeless veterans in Vallejo and Solano and Napa counties.

The Santa Rosa-based agency, funded by a Department of Veterans

Affairs grant, has 15 offices in the southwest, including a large one in Sacramento. It's recently expanded into Arizona and Nevada, he said. The agency had determined to create a new office somewhere in Northern California, and a needs assessment found Vallejo had the greatest need, Deal said.

"We also do out-treatment, employment training and a myriad of other services," he said. "The office on Mare Island is about homelessness prevention with more services hopefully coming."

The space near the Veterans Administration clinic seemed like a natural fit, but the current contingent of five employees also use mobile case management, Deal said.

"They can do their job wherever the vets and their families are," he said. The agency's field workers scour the area for homeless vets, though drop-ins are also welcome at the site, he said.

"We do an assessment of the human being, look at the root cause of the homelessness problem," he said. "If they're unemployed we try to get them a job. If they're hungry, we tie them into a food bank or other aid. If they're dealing with mental health issues, we'll hook them up to the VA for mental health services. We work with them for as long as it takes."

To continue accommodating the growth of existing and new businesses, LMI is upgrading more than 200,000 square feet of space in five buildings, in addition to ongoing demolition and infrastructure projects around the island, Moser said.

"The job gains we are seeing are the direct result of our investment in things like infrastructure, building rehabilitation and environmental cleanup, and these will continue to drive future growth." LMI spokesman Jason Keadjian said.

The most recent bi-annual Mare Island jobs survey showed consistent job growth for the ninth consecutive reporting period, which covers the last four and a half years, Moser said.

LMI has invested more than \$112 million in the infrastructure, building rehabilitation and reuse of the former Naval Shipyard, Kiadjian said.

For more information, visit www.discovermareisland.com or call 578-2785.

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