



Ex-orchard to grow buildings

Expanding business plans move into a new 230-acre corporate park in south Fresno.

BY SANFORD NAX
THE FRESNO BEE

A company that prints and distributes labels, forms and other business documents is the first tenant of a 230-acre master-planned corporate park being carved out of a former orchard in south Fresno.

Corporate Express Document & Print Management is expanding to the emerging North Pointe Business Park near North and Orange avenues. After 15 months of scrutiny and consideration, the company decided to stay in Fresno and relocate printing operations from a 55,000-square-foot building in northwest Fresno. Western regional distribution functions will shift to Fresno from other locations, said Mike Cate, president.

The new 110,500-square-foot center will distribute labels and other forms to customers between Arizona and Seattle. Corporate Express Document & Print Management also will start a new line in Fresno — manufacturing of business forms.

The company employs 50 people in Fresno. That number is expected to expand by half over the next 18 months, said Cate, who is based in Omaha, Neb., but was in Fresno on Tuesday to celebrate the opening of North Pointe.

The business park is in enterprise and empowerment zones, which make companies that locate there eligible for tax credits when they hire workers and buy equipment.

"It's good to see the earth-moving equipment," Cate said. "I just signed for a \$1.2 million printing press to be delivered in the fourth quarter, along with four more relocating to Fresno."

Those words marked a significant milestone for the Parnagian family, which owns Fowler Packing Co. and grew peaches and nectarines for almost three decades on the property that now is sprouting industrial buildings.

With the expansion of North Avenue to four lanes, the family decided the time had come to develop the property for commercial use, said Ross Parnagian, a principal in the family's company, G3 Development.

Family members pulled out 40 acres of peaches and nectarines six years ago — and 13 more in the last few weeks as they prepared for their first tenant in the business park, he said.

The Parnagian family will continue to farm and pack fruit but is diversifying. In addition to the building for Corporate Express, G3 and developer partner ExTerra Realty Partners will build a 49,000-square-foot showcase building at North Avenue and North Pointe Drive, a main entrance to the business park.

No tenants are lined up for the structure; developers want it to "set the tone" for North Pointe, said Ethan Smith, an industrial

specialist at Grubb&Ellis/Pearson Realty who is heading marketing efforts.

Corporate Express is in the first phase of North Pointe, which is 70 acres and could include 1.1 million square feet of businesses. If fully built out, the business park eventually could contain 4 million square feet of commercial buildings.

Its presence means more land is ready to go for businesses that need to move or expand quickly, said Dave Spaur, president of the Economic Development Corp. serving Fresno County.

"This is what I've been working for since I stepped foot in Fresno County," he said.

The 230 acres in North Pointe is not enough for the long term but is a start, Spaur said, and will complement Fancher Creek, a master-planned residential and commercial development proposed for southeast Fresno that will feature 150 acres of high-class business park.

ExTerra Realty Partners became familiar with the San Joaquin Valley when its principals, working on behalf of the Economic Development Corp., tried to persuade Cisco Systems to move some functions to Clovis in 2003.

That deal fell through, Spaur said, but the principals of ExTerra teamed up with the farming family to develop North Pointe. "This represents ... a culmination of a lot of joint efforts," said Kathy Millison, Clovis city manager and Economic Development Corp. representative.



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