

Renovations begin to open South Milwaukee Bucyrus campus to new businesses



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An aerial shot of the former Bucyrus-Erie campus, which stretches 29 acres between Milwaukee and Rawson avenues with eight buildings.

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Renovation work is starting in the 29-acre former Bucyrus-Erie campus in South Milwaukee to prepare the empty campus for new businesses and jobs.

That property on Milwaukee Avenue most recently housed mining office and manufacturing operations for Caterpillar Inc., which acquired Bucyrus-Erie in 2011. Caterpillar has moved out of the campus, ending its history as a one-company mining equipment campus that stretches back to the 1800s.

Reich Brothers LLC bought the campus in August, and now will transform it into a more traditional, urban business park with offices and manufacturing space for multiple companies, said Michael Reich, director of acquisitions and business development for the New York firm. City officials are working with Reich to design new public infrastructure to weave the campus into the surrounding city street grid and open it to the general public.

“Hopefully, over the coming months we’ll attract some new jobs and new employers to the site,” Reich said. “We’re off and running, and the site is ready for business on a go-forward basis.”

Reich said work has begun to rehab the property’s buildings for new tenants. That work will include new paint, lighting, doors and roofs, and preparing interiors for future tenant renovations. The campus includes three larger manufacturing and warehouse facilities with about 530,000 combined square feet, and three office buildings. There’s about 775,000 square feet of total space in its eight buildings, Reich said.

“The goal is each building stands alone, and can be leased out separately to different employers,” he said.

This can all happen now because Caterpillar cut ties with the property. The manufacturer for years had cut back operations in South Milwaukee, moving some jobs to Arizona. Manufacturing operations moved off the former Bucyrus campus onto land Caterpillar owns immediately north, on the opposite side of Rawson Avenue.

“Caterpillar is committed to South Milwaukee north of Rawson, and they’re doing some really good things, they’re still making machinery,” said South Milwaukee Mayor Erik Brooks.

Reich Brothers and Caterpillar recently negotiated to end the manufacturer’s ongoing lease for the Bucyrus campus, Reich said. Caterpillar, through an agreement with the property’s previous owner, had years left on its lease for the property. That added another layer of complexity to any effort to bring new companies into the property.

“They were great to work with,” Reich said. “We both wanted the same thing.”

Reich Brothers hired Milwaukee real estate firm The Dickman Co. Inc. to market the South Milwaukee buildings to new businesses. President Sam Dickman Jr. will lead that effort, Reich said.

Reich and South Milwaukee officials also plan to change the city streets and sidewalks around the Bucyrus property. As a one-company campus, it was closed off to the surrounding public streets. South Milwaukee and Reich Brothers are splitting the cost of designing new roads and utilities to open it back up so multiple companies can move in, Brooks said.

“In a lot of ways, the campus won’t feel like a fortress anymore,” Brooks said.

South Milwaukee officials last year approved a tax incremental financing district that would likely help pay for some of that infrastructure work.

Timing for that work is to be determined, Brooks said. But the upcoming summer could bring changes to Milwaukee Avenue where it runs past the southern end of the campus. Pending Common Council approval, a four-block stretch of Milwaukee Avenue will be rebuilt to be more attractive with new lighting, planters, bike racks and bike lanes, Brooks said.

Also, in a project that has generated a lot of buzz, a statue of pro wrestler Reggie “Da Crusher” Lisowski could be unveiled in June in a new small park that would be built across Milwaukee Avenue from the entrance to the Bucyrus property.