

# Worcester **Business** Journal

## Follow the Yellow Brick Road

**By Christina P. O'Neill**

Monday, 26 December 2005

### **AAF President, Herbert S. Alexander, speaks about the growth of Westborough**

For Boston-based CPA firm Brown & Brown LLP, the decision to open a branch office in Westboro evolved from the firm's growing base of Worcester/Metrowest clients. The clients didn't like the commute into Boston. And neither did the company's employees, who had either relocated to the region or who had always been based there.



Merrill Lynch is in the process of site hunting along the Route 9-495 corridor, seeking to relocate its 25-person Worcester office to somewhere along the 495 corridor. "Worcester is still the cornerstone of our marketplace" says Gene Clark, resident director for Merrill Lynch's Worcester office. But with the growth of the area and the draw, for example, of Solomon Pond Mall, "It's not that much of a transition for someone from Worcester to go out on that 495 belt or Route 9 into Westboro or Shrewsbury. It's not really inconvenient at all."

So, are we seeing a diaspora of what used to be a Worcester-based economy moving east? Or is it the Boston "suburbs" moving west?

"What we've found is that Boston is gradually moving out," says Clark. "The suburbs are moving out to 495, as they used to just come out to [Route] 128."

Real growth along the corridor

While Massachusetts' economic growth is regarded as sluggish overall, the Metrowest area is considered to be the fastest-growing region in the state (see related story, page 3). The local economy has changed greatly, says Robert Charron, managing partner of Carlin, Charron &

Rosen, which moved its entire Worcester operation of almost 170 staffers into 47,000 square feet of Class A office space at 1400 Computer Dr. last year.

He says the firm's client mix changed almost immediately after the move, as CCR started getting a piece of the high-tech and biotech business along the 495 corridor.

It's also been an inducement for CCR's Natick and Framingham clients, who have been more receptive to the firm's Westboro location than they were to Worcester. CCR has offices in Providence, Hartford and Boston, Charron notes, and the Westboro office is about equidistant from all of them.

Alexander, Aronson & Finning has been headquartered in Westboro for more than 30 years. Managing Partner Herb Alexander, who has watched the area grow, notes the quality of the office space and the type of high-tech firms that make the area their home. "They spin off other businesses as well and the executives are open to ideas, and so we find that it's very conducive to our type of practice," he says.

#### Bringing people back into the fold

Another benefit of a Boston firm opening a Westboro-area office is that it's easier to recruit new employees or re-attract former employees. Carolyn Stall, a partner at Brown & Brown, says the ability to provide a working environment outside the Boston area has been a strong attraction for employees living in the region who don't want a long commute tacked onto what, in busy season, can already be a 12- to 14-hour day. The difference for them, she says, is a 25-minute commute to Westboro as opposed to a much longer commute into Boston, complicated by the Big Dig and rush hours.

#### Keeping in touch with Worcester

But the Westboro migration isn't a wholesale rout. "We do miss Worcester," says Charron. He says CCR is in the process of establishing a smaller-office presence back in the downtown, just to have a meeting place for Worcester-based clients for whom the city - not Westboro - is the convenient spot.