

## Polymer Alliance Zone buys \$7.5M manufacturing property in area



**BOTH PHOTOS:** Polymer Alliance Zone purchased the former U.S. Equipment, U.S. Crusher and Labor Services 363,000 square-foot building at 900 West 9th Ave. in December 2022 for \$7.5 million.

By **FRED PACE**  
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HUNTINGTON — Polymer Alliance Zone of West Virginia President Keith Burdette says the economic development organization's recent purchase of a \$7.5 million manufacturing site in Huntington has two objectives: to create jobs and investment in Huntington.

Burdette said the Polymer Alliance Zone closed on the former U.S. Equipment, U.S. Crusher and Labor Services building at 900 West 9th Ave. in December.

"We think this building and site gives us a great opportunity," Burdette said. "The building is 363,000 square feet."

The Polymer Alliance Zone (PAZ) of West Virginia was created in 1996 as a pilot project through an executive order of the governor. Today, PAZ has one of the highest concentrations of



KEITH BURDETTE

high-technology, specialty and engineering polymers production in the United States.

PAZ is a membership organization that includes polymer and related industries. Burdette says it strives to create new, good-paying jobs and an improved quality of life by expanding the manufacturing base in Cabell, Wayne, Mason, Jackson, Pleasants, Tyler and Wood counties.

"There isn't another building like this in the state's inventory of available properties," Burdette said of the new Huntington site. "There isn't one anything close to this."

The project was financed with loans through West Virginia Economic Development Authority and the West Virginia Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council, Burdette said.

Burdette said in March of last year, David Lieving of the Huntington Area Development Council (HADCO) became aware the building was for sale. "Our relationship with HADCO was key to this investment," he said.

The Polymer Alliance Zone is one of HADCO's regional marketing partners.

"HADCO facilitated the process for Cabell County and Wayne County to become a member of the Polymer Alliance Zone in 2018," said Lieving, HADCO's president and CEO. "The partnership has allowed us to expand our reach through a regional marketing effort offered by PAZ that allows HADCO to tell our story in a more cost-effective way by simply collaborating with Polymer Alliance Zone on marketing efforts. This partnership allows us to gain access to a bigger team and it also helps us to cast a wider net to our target audience of potential investors interested in the growth of the polymer sector in the Ohio Valley."

Lieving also serves on the Polymer



Alliance board of directors, representing HADCO.

"We made them aware of this property being on the market and encouraged them to consider purchasing the property," he said. "One of our biggest challenges in Cabell and Wayne is having ready sites and buildings available for new investors to consider. When opportunities surface, we need to be ready to offer options that meet the needs of businesses looking for a location to stand up operations. Our mantra is 'No Product, No Project.'"

If HADCO cannot meet the real estate requirements of businesses it tries to recruit, they will locate elsewhere, Lieving said.

"This is a large industrial building in the center of the Huntington Industrial Center that has rail and many other amenities. Rail-served properties are rare in our entire region. The building will require some investment to update it and to get it ready for a new business to occupy the space, but it is a good opportunity for us to attract some new business to locate operations here in Huntington."

Currently, Pittsburgh-based Koppers is the only tenant of the building. It leases about 150,000 square feet, Burdette said.

Koppers' Huntington facility designs, manufactures and markets track components consisting mainly of standard joint bars and insulated joints for joining rail. Products include bonded insulated joints, polyurethane encapsulated joints and epoxy fiberglass joints. Its products are sold globally and are involved in the utilization and maintenance of railroad track structures.

"That leaves over 200,000 square feet," Burdette said. "It has rail, both adjacent and at least one place into the building, which is highly unusual. It has about six overhead cranes. Again, highly unusual there."

Burdette said the building needs cleaned up and cleaned out.

"We are looking over the building and getting a plan of what we need to do and what we need to prioritize," he said. "We've got a whole litany of

things, but the biggest concentration is start cleaning it out, cleaning it up, getting it ready to lease. It's got a probably a half century of grime in it."

Burdette estimated the cleaning phase could take from six to nine months. While that is taking place, tenant recruitment is focused on polymers and polymer-related companies, he said.

"Our board has always taken the position that the property is a means to an end, so we don't limit to just polymers who's in our buildings," he said. "So for instance, in Parkersburg, we have a big plastic packaging company. But we also have a metal fabricating company that does work for a defense contractor. We have an electric bike company that designs and sells electric bikes. So we have a mix of a lot of different things."

Burdette says the Huntington building could be a lot of different things.

"It could be a really top-notch heavy manufacturing facility, because like I said, it has overhead cranes," he said.

Burdette says the goal is to find a big opportunity with the right investment to take over the remaining space in the building, but the PAZ is open to leasing portions of the building.

"The building has expansion opportunities," he said. "We have the potential to create more warehouse manufacturing space. This site has a lot of potential."

Burdette said PAZ wants to be more than just landlords.

"Our mission is to improve the building," he said. "We take great pride in our property, and this property will need a lot of tender loving care. But it's got great bones, and we're gonna give it the attention it needs and hopefully find a company that will create some jobs in Huntington."

Burdette urges anyone interest in leasing the building to contact him at 304-428-1622.

Fred Pace is the business reporter for The Herald-Dispatch. Follow him at Facebook.com/FredPaceHD and via Twitter @FredPaceHD.

## In soaked Calif., few homeowners have flood insurance

By **MICHAEL PHILLIS**  
and **ADAM BEAM**  
The Associated Press

ACAMPO, Calif. — On Sunday morning, Kyle Starks woke up to floodwaters that reached the door of his Jeep after yet another heavy rain storm drenched California. Emergency crews showed up with boats to float Starks and other residents of his rural mobile home park in Acampo to safety.

Beyond the physical destruction, the storm could pack a financial hit: Starks does not have flood insurance.

"I didn't think it would flood this bad," he explained from an evacuation center, worried that water damaged wiring and air conditioning equipment.

In California, only about 230,000 homes and other buildings have flood insurance policies, which are separate from homeowners insurance. That means only about 2% of properties are covered against flooding. The federal government is the insurer for the bulk of them — about 191,000 as of December. Private insurers issued the rest, according to the most recent state data from 2021.

In California, 32 trillion gallons of rain and snow fell since Christmas. The water washed out roads, knocked out power and created mudslides by soaking wildfire-charred hills. It caused damage in 41 of the state's 58 counties. At least 21 people have died.

It takes targeted study to know the role of climate change in specific weather, but warmer air means storms like the ones that deluged California in recent weeks can carry more water.

Yet California's drought has dulled people's sense of the risk of flooding. People usually buy insurance after disasters when the risk is visceral, said Amy Bach, the executive director of insurance consumers group United Policyholders.

"People think the only people that need flood insurance are people who live right on the beach or on the banks of a river that has a history of flooding," Bach said. In reality, far more people are threatened by rushing or rising water.

When you buy a home, a key document will be official Federal Emergency Management Agency maps that tell you if it's in a high risk flood zone. If it is and you have a federally-backed mortgage, you are required to buy flood insurance that costs on average \$950 a year. Many banks require it too.

Yet FEMA maps are limited and only take into account certain kinds of flooding — they don't really predict flood risk. Flooding caused by heavy rains that back up storm drains is not counted, for example. The limitations mean flood risk is underestimated nationally. The maps particularly lowball the chance of disaster in California, according to Matthew Eby, executive director of First Street Foundation, a risk analysis organization.

The FEMA maps don't show Stark's mobile home in a high risk area. And three years before his neighbor Juan Reyes bought his house, a series of storms dumped record amounts of rain on the state and flooded their neighborhood.

Reyes knew this, but he still did not buy flood insurance. It was too expensive, he said, and wasn't required. Plus, he thought local officials had improved the storm drainage system so that a similar flood wouldn't happen again. But it did and Reyes also had to be rescued by boat. He's staying at the same evacuation center, hoping his home isn't too badly damaged.

The storms damaged several thousand homes so badly they'll need to be repaired before people can live in

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■ **Mail** to The Herald-Dispatch, Attn: Sunday Business, P.O. Box 2017, Huntington, WV 25720.

■ **Fax** to 304-526-2857.

■ **Email** to fp@hdmediallc.com. Please include a telephone number in case there are any questions.

### BUSINESS ROUNDUP

#### The Health Plan donates to West Virginia food banks

WHEELING, W.Va. — The Health Plan recently donated \$360,000 to 12 food banks across West Virginia, including in Huntington. THP presented \$30,000 check to each food bank continues the organization's "Spirit of Giving" campaign.

The donations will help each organization restock their pantries and provide warm meals to West Virginians in need,

allowing each organization to continue changing lives and making an impact across the state.

The Health Plan donated more than \$1 million to nonprofit organizations in 2022 alone.

#### Cabell Huntington Hospital named one of America's 100 Best Hospitals for 2023

HUNTINGTON — Cabell Huntington Hospital has been selected as one of America's 100 Best Hospitals for 2023. According to research released by Healthgrades, the ranking puts Cabell Huntington in the top 2% of hospitals

nationwide for overall clinical performance across the most common conditions and procedures. Cabell Huntington is the only hospital in West Virginia to be named one of America's 100 Best Hospitals in 2023, and it is the fifth consecutive year the hospital has been among America's 250 Best Hospitals.

According to Healthgrades, patients treated in hospitals that achieved the top 100 honor, on average, had a 25.5% lower risk of death than if they were treated in hospitals that did not receive the award, as measured across 31 rated conditions and procedures where mortality is the outcome.