

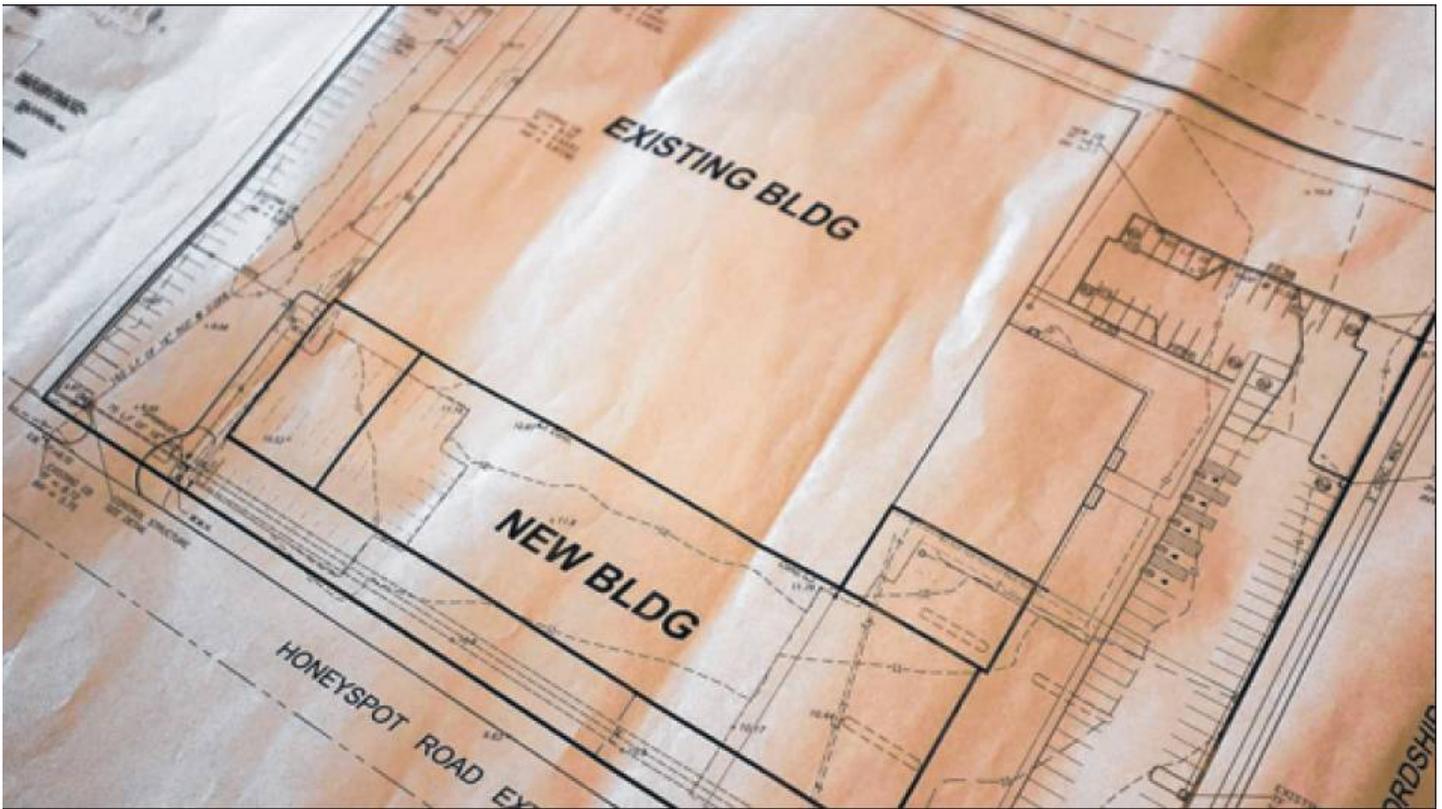
CONNECTICUT POST

CONNECTICUT DISTRIBUTORS

Toasting the new space

Expansion will keep liquor distributor in Stratford

BY HUGH BAILEY



Site plans for Connecticut Distributors Inc.'s new 50,000-square-foot addition. Brian Albenze,



right, president of Connecticut Distributors Inc., gives a tour of the bottle line in the company's warehouse.

Brian A. Pounds/Staff photographer

STRATFORD — Connecticut Distributors Inc. was on its way out of town. Local officials made sure it didn't happen.

A part of the Stratford business scene for 45 years, the liquor distributor had outgrown its space at 333 Lordship Blvd. About four years ago, company leaders started looking around the state for a new home.

“We didn't think staying was an option,” said Brian Albenze, CDI president. The company looked closely at a North Haven location, as well as sites in Derby, Shelton and Trumbull.

When Stratford officials heard, they reacted quickly. After shepherding the company through various approval processes, town leaders celebrated last week as the company broke ground on a 50,000-square-foot addition to its warehouse and offices. About 17 jobs will be added, bringing employment up to 271 people.

Hiring has already started, along with construction of a new parking lot

and preliminary work on the building addition.

Albenze said the reaction of the town was vital to keeping the business in Stratford. “In terms of their resources and their outreach, from their initial engagement, they really guided us through the process,” he said.

CDI needed a zoning variance to comply with green-space requirements, and the process ran smoothly, Albenze said.

“We all worked together, and we’re very grateful that they’re staying,” said Karen Kaiser, Stratford’s director of economic development.

Liquor distributors form a state-mandated link between producers and retailers. The industry is heavily regulated, and directly tied to the state, so when CDI considered moving it could only look as far as the Connecticut line.

CDI sells by the case or bottle to restaurants and retail outlets across the state. With a sales force of about 100 people and 45 trucks on the roads, it’s a 24-hour operation from Monday morning to Friday night, Albenze said.

The company, which is part of the Charmer Sunbelt Group, a nationwide network of liquor distributors, will be eligible for a tax abatement based on its capital improvements. Albenze said the company plans to apply.

Kaiser said CDI is an important part of the local business scene. “They’ve been extremely generous in giving back to community,” she said, citing the town’s 375th anniversary and Blues on the Beach concert among events the company has supported.

Mayor John Harkins, state Sen. Andres Ayala Jr. and state Rep. Terry Backer attended the groundbreaking last week, along with CDI officials and staff.

“I can’t say enough about the town and how helpful they’ve been,” Albenze said.

**“We all worked together, and we’re very grateful that they’re staying,”
Karen Kaiser, Stratford’s director of economic development**



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