

Asian carp controversy sparks a war between the states

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

The state of Illinois is locked in a battle with other Great Lakes states seeking to close off Illinois' access to Lake Michigan. At the crux of the fight are the Asian carp that have invaded the inland river system.

Asian carp - more specifically, bighead and silver carp - reportedly got loose in the Mississippi River during the flood of 1993. They are considered invasive species by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as they destroy the habitat for other fish. Because of this, the Corps installed an electric fish barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, a key connection between the inland waterway system and Lake Michigan. The first barrier was installed on a demonstration basis in 2002, followed by a permanent barrier in 2004.

However, in November 2009, DNA of Asian carp was found beyond those two electric fences. That spurred a reaction by Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox; he went to the U.S. Supreme Court seeking an injunction to close Illinois' access to Lake Michigan due to worries about the impact that the carp might have on the \$7.5 billion Great Lakes commercial



Asian carp have permeated the American inland waterways including the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. Six Great Lakes states are trying to force Illinois to close its access to Lake Michigan to prevent the fish from invading the Great Lakes. photo courtesy of The Associated Press

fishing industry. The states of New York, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Ohio piled on as well. On Jan. 5, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed a countersuit asking

the court to reject Michigan's injunction. The Illinois Chamber of Commerce and the American Waterways Operators filed affidavits in support of Madigan's petition. On Jan. 19, the U.S. Supreme Court

rejected Michigan's injunction request, keeping Illinois' access open for now, but the White House is calling a summit

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Durbin, Costello at odds over mandatory flood insurance for American Bottom

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello are working together to craft a solution to the looming implementation of new Federal Emergency Management Agency flood maps. But there is still disagreement on a key point: Should property owners in the flood plain be required to buy flood insurance?

In July 2009, Costello introduced H.R. 3415, a bill that would give areas up to seven years to make repairs and alterations to their levee systems so that they would meet the 100-year flood standard. In the meantime, new flood maps would not go into effect. This would maintain the area's



Durbin



Costello

current flood classification and people would be encouraged - but not required - to buy flood insurance.

H.R. 3415 would only apply to areas that meet the following criteria: the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has determined

that there are design deficiencies with the levees protecting the area; there is an approved plan to bring the levees up to the 100-year flood standard; and, there is a financing plan in place to fund the repair project. While the bill was designed to help the property owners of the American Bottom, it would pertain to all floodplain areas in the country dealing with the FEMA remapping initiative.

"We believe that if you have local officials who are doing the right thing putting a plan in place to repair the levees and protect the people in the area, that they're doing all of the right things," Costello said, "then there ought to be an incentive for that to allow them to move forward without penalizing them or the people who live in the area. We still

encourage everyone to purchase federal flood insurance under the federal flood insurance program at a less expensive rate - before the new maps may go into effect - whenever that may be."

Costello says his bill has been held up because the committee that it has been assigned to, the House Financial Services Committee, has been busy with banking reform legislation.

"I've talked with the chairman of the committee of jurisdiction and he said, 'We want to work with you on this. We understand that these problems exist and that we have to find a solution, but please let us try and get our banking reform bill and some of these other things off of our

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Short-term outlook for architectural firms rides on public funding, projects

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

The outlook for the architecture business depends in large part on the focus of the firm. Firms that specialize in government and institutional building are doing fine. Those that depend on the private sector see a much longer and darker tunnel ahead.

Dennis Young, president and chief executive officer of Ittner Architects, for example, says 2009 was a good year for his firm. Ittner is a 100-year-old firm that has specialized in the design of

educational structures since its founding by William B. Ittner.

"Last year was a pretty tough year for the economy," Young said. "The public at large had a pretty tough economic go of it. We do a lot of school districts and colleges. In public work, they have to listen carefully to their constituents, but what I have found is that if the projects have a great enough need and there's been sufficient public engagement, these projects go forward."

Young says many of the school administrators he works with today lived through the recessions of 1981 and 1990 and have learned from mistakes made then. He adds that school district leaders then took a hunker down approach. If they had been planning a new 15,000-square-foot gym, for example, they scaled it back to 10,000 square feet to save money. But, by the mid 1990s, they discovered that they really needed the 15,000-square-foot gym and had

essentially wasted their money on the smaller version and wished they had that money back.

"There are enough leaders in education today," Young said, "who lived through those times to know that, 'Hey, if we're going to do it, we're going to do it right. But we might have to phase it and do one piece at a time - as opposed to all the pieces at once and doing all of

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Ted W. Dennis	Freeark Harvey Mendillo Dennis, et al.	Belleville	618.233.2686	Med Mal Def; Pl Def: Gen; Trans Def: Incl Av/FELA/Mari
Theodore R. Harvey, Jr.	Freeark Harvey Mendillo Dennis, et al.	Belleville	618.233.2686	Commercial Litigation; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def; Tox Tort Def
James R. Mendillo	Freeark Harvey Mendillo Dennis, et al.	Belleville	618.233.2686	Insur/Insur Cov/Reinsur; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def; Trans Def: Incl Av/FELA/Mari; Pl: General
Ransom P. Wuller	Freeark Harvey Mendillo Dennis, et al.	Belleville	618.233.2686	Class Act/Mass Tort Def; Commercial Litigation; Med Mal Def; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def
Mark A. Glass	Glass & Korein LLC	Belleville/Collinsville/E St Louis	618.274.0434	Work Comp
Michael H. Korein	Glass & Korein LLC	Belleville/Collinsville/E St Louis	618.274.0434	Work Comp
Troy A. Bozarth	HeplerBroom LLC	Edwardsville	618.307.1124	Commercial Litigation; Pl Def: Gen; Trans Def: Incl Av/FELA/Mari
Gordon R. Broom	HeplerBroom LLC	Edwardsville	618.656.0184	Class Act/Mass Tort Def; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def; Prof'l Mal Def: Incl Legal/Tech/Fin; Tox Tort Def
Jeffrey S. Hebrank	HeplerBroom LLC	Edwardsville	618.656.0184	Class Act/Mass Tort Def; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def; Tox Tort Def
Larry E. Hepler	HeplerBroom LLC	Edwardsville	618.656.0184	Class Act/Mass Tort Def; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def; Tox Tort Def
Stephen R. Kaufmann	HeplerBroom LLC	Edwardsville	618.656.0184	Class Act/Mass Tort Def; Insur/Insur Cov/Reinsur; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def; Tox Tort Def
Theodore J. MacDonald, Jr.	HeplerBroom LLC	St Louis/Edwardsville	314.480.4155	Employment; Management; Insur/Insur Cov/Reinsur; Pl Def: Gen; Prod Liab Def; Tox Tort Def
Michael Reda	HeplerBroom LLC	Edwardsville	618.656.0184	Pl Def: Gen
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Richard K. Hunsaker	Heyl Royster Voelker & Allen PC	Edwardsville	618.656.4646	Class Act/Mass Tort Def; Med Mal Def; Prof'l Mal Def: Incl Legal/Tech/Fin
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Increased competition for projects, lag in private sector work challenges engineering industry

By ANGELA SHULTIS

While the national economy is showing cautious signs of recovery, the engineering industry is expected to show signs of recovery too, albeit more slowly.

But not because of anything inherent in the industry, however. The fact is industry trends tend to lag behind the economy as a whole, to the tune of about 12-18 months. It's a fact that, according to Burns & McDonnell associate vice president Breck Washam, will make the industry cautiously optimistic as 2010 takes hold.

"There are a number of areas seeing softness in certain markets," Washam said. "Energy demand is down, and there's regulatory uncertainty," he added, referring to markets that even in a difficult 2009 had remained relatively strong. "There's still strength in transmission and distribution locally with upgrades to substations and transmission lines, but that's a niche area."

The lag is reality for both the national and regional markets, a fact echoed by Burns & McDonnell's Mark Harrison, office manager in the firm's O'Fallon, Ill. office. "Burns & McDonnell was just feeling the effects (of a lag) in the second half of 2009," Harrison said. "We'll continue to feel it for the first portion of this calendar year, but I do believe better days are ahead." In Southwestern Illinois specifically, he said, "there appears to be a little more energy in an attempt to get projects out. Money is available for funding [for public projects] which is having some positive effect on the engineering business."

As in many industries, the public and private sectors can expect very different things in the year to come. The public sector - with an influx of federal stimulus money in various forms - has the best potential for growth, or at least recovery,

in 2010. And firms like Horner & Shifrin, specializing in infrastructure and public projects, say they are well-positioned to take advantage of that potential.

According to Horner & Shifrin senior engineering manager Brooks Brestal, even that niche is cyclical, with potential upticks on the heels of elections, transportation bills and capital bills. As funding becomes available through any or all of these means, engineering work on public projects naturally follows.

There are two basic areas in which the work comes, Brestal says: those projects that were "shovel ready" going into the funding cycle, and those that need to get "plans on the shelf" to show need, even if the funding is not yet available.

In all sectors, however - public and private - competition is key.

"There certainly are continued price pressures, with a lot more firms competing for much less work," Washam said. As has been a growing trend through tight times, he added, "there are a number of firms that are trying to get into markets where they don't have experience or haven't traditionally been."

For Burns & McDonnell, being a firm with diversity in terms of both geography and capabilities is a saving grace. Tapping

into resources in other offices - and planning ahead for tighter times to come - has been a regular practice. Knowing there's a lag in the industry allows proactive firms to plan accordingly. The key, Washam said, is "recognizing where that work is at, and getting our resources focused in some of those areas. We're redirecting our resources to other areas, which is something we continually do."

For those in the industry seeking work in the public sector, the year holds multiple opportunities in the region - such as the New Mississippi River Bridge Project. Additional opportunities, Brestal says, include a list of projects that state agencies have funding for, and will be "putting on the shelf" for future funding. On the docket for Horner & Shifrin, he adds, is work on the I-270/Illinois Rte.

3 interchange as well as an expansion of Rte. 3 in the Waterloo area that's in the planning stages, with expectations of a three to five-year time frame before construction begins.

Harrison sees bright spots as well. "We're seeing that IDOT seems to be including more projects in its quarterly bulletins special bulletin with some bigger projects...there's a lot of competition for them, but we see more projects coming out of the state as a result of the legislature and stimulus money."

Increased competition, lack of private sector spending capabilities are problems the engineering industry will continue to face, according to Brestal, but they're solvable. "We're engineers. Basically, if there's a problem, we come up with a solution," he said.

IBJ Business News

Mavrakos chocolates available again at Chocolate Chocolate Co.

Mavrakos, the historic chocolate brand that was launched in 1913 in downtown St. Louis by Greek immigrant John Mavrakos, has reemerged under the

name of Chocolate Chocolate Co. in the Edwardsville Crossing Dierbergs. Owner Dan Abel has revived the brand.

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Web site: www.ibjonline.com
 E-mail: info@ibjonline.com

Illinois Business Journal
 P.O. Box 248
 Edwardsville, IL 62025

President/CEO:
 Kerry L. Beiser
kbeiser@ibjonline.com
 618-465-5572

Vice President/COO:
 Alan J. Ortals
aortals@ibjonline.com
 618-659-1997

Staff Writers:
 Kate Geno
 Laura Reed
 Angela Shultis

Cartoonist:
 Gary McCoy

Contributing Writers:
 Richard Ellerbrake
 R.W. Hafer
 Patrick McKeehan
 Kevin Riggs
 Doug Whitley

Southwestern Illinois' upcoming developments buck recessionary gloom

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

With the nation struggling to recover from the great recession, development appears to be picking up in Southwestern Illinois. Here's a look at some of the projects in the works:

Alton. Imperial Manufacturing, a Canadian company that manufactures more than 7,000 products for heating, air conditioning, ventilation and building products in six North American locations, came to the Alton Center Business Park in 2007. The company is in the process of a plant expansion to 192,400 square feet, nearly triple what it occupied just four years ago. The Alton plant makes pipe for wood burning stoves and ventilation piping for clothes driers, home ventilators and other building applications.

Operations manager Tom Blair says Imperial expects to complete the expansion by the end of the first quarter and it is already in the process of hiring additional employees; that will take full-time employment up to about 130 with another 35 to 55 temporary employees brought in during the busy season.

Champion Hotels of Oklahoma City has acquired the Days Inn on Homer Adams Parkway. Approximately half the existing structure will be demolished and rebuilt, then opened as a new Best

Western. The property is being divided into three lots with the Best Western on one and the other two available for future development. A new hotel in downtown Alton is also in the planning stages.

Collinsville. Reisch Haley Properties of O'Fallon, Mo. purchased the Orchards Shopping Center on Vandalia Street last year and is in the midst of a \$3.2 million facelift of the property and recruiting new tenants. A new hardware store and cafe have already signed on. Construction is expected to be completed in March.

Kohl's department store has begun demolition of the former Wal-Mart store in the Lakeview Shopping Center on Beltline Road and will be building a new \$7.5 million store in its place this year.

A new development will be coming to the intersection of Vandalia Street and Pine Lake Road. This will consist of a new CVS Pharmacy and a 10,300-square-foot, multi-tenant commercial building. This \$6.5 million project will be completed in 2010 as well.

Rural King has purchased the building that formerly housed the Value City store on Collinsville Road and will be locating one of its stores there. Rural King, headquartered in Mattoon, sells such products as livestock feed, farm

equipment, agricultural parts, lawn mowers, work clothes, fashion clothing, house wares and toys. It has 43 stores scattered across six Midwestern states.

Edwardsville. Demolition has already begun to make way for a new four-story, 30,800-square-foot office building on N. Main Street. It's being developed by North Main Street Plaza LLC. Construction is expected to take about a year and the building will be the new home of a large law firm.

The third phase of the Plaza on the Park project is under way. The third building in the development will be three stories and total about 30,000 square feet. The first floor will be offered for retail and commercial uses. The upper two floors will consist of 13 residential apartments. Construction is expected to be completed by the end of July.

Holland Construction Services has just completed work on a new U.S. Bank branch at Illinois Rte. 157 and Lewis Road. U.S. Bank is anticipating a grand opening in March.

And in Gateway Commerce Center, Rand Diversified Companies is adding three major production lines to its operations at 21 West Gateway Commerce Center. The New Jersey-based company does contract packaging and manufacturing at the Gateway location and will be packaging Trident, Dentine and Stride Gum under a contract with Cadbury plc. Employment at the facility is expected to increase to about 200. In addition, another one of Gateway's major tenants is looking to expand further.

Granite City. The new city-owned movie theater is under construction on Niedringhaus Avenue in downtown Granite City. The theater will be owned by the city and operated by St. Louis

Cinemas under a contract with the city. It is expected to open in April. Also, one of the city's major industries is in the early stages of exploring a major expansion of its operations there.

O'Fallon. Balke Brown Associates plans to start work this spring on Parkway Lakeside Apartment Houses, a 232-unit, high-end apartment development near the intersection of Green Mount Road and Frank Scott Parkway East.

Shiloh. In December 2009, Dettmer Homes began construction of new homes at the Villages at Wingate, a mixed-use development featuring homes, shopping, a professional park and senior living. Dettmer's portion of Wingate will be \$22 million and it will occupy 82 of the 221 single-family home sites.

Swansea. Rural King also is planning a new store in Swansea. It will occupy the 84,000-square-foot building on N. Illinois Street last occupied by Value City.

Holland Construction Services Inc. broke ground in December 2009 on the Villas at Crystal Lake. The first of 10 apartment buildings is expected to open for tenants by this summer. The three-story building complex will cost \$20 million, cover 211,000 square feet and offer 216 apartments and a clubhouse with a community room, a theater, a fitness center, billiard room and changing rooms near a swimming pool.

Wood River. WR Landing LLC is planning to begin development this year on a \$16.7 million project at the intersection of Illinois 255 and Illinois Rte. 143. The development will consist of a 110-room Holiday Inn Express hotel, a 24-hour Country Kitchen Restaurant, a 24-hour fuel/convenience store and casual dining restaurants.



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