PORT OF STOCKTON—The deep-water channel into this commerce hub has been a valuable resource since the inception of the city. Now entering its 85th year, the Port of Stockton is looking for ways to accommodate a growing future.

The Port was integral in the California Gold Rush, since the San Joaquin River connected the city with the Delta waterways and, ultimately, the San Francisco Bay Area. These days, the Port is just as integral because of its proximity to more than just the Bay.

Port operations are thriving because it is close to four major freeways, the Stockton Metropolitan Airport and two cross-country railroads. Those connections make the commerce hub a natural choice when it comes to locating operating facilities and the like.

“Calendar year 2017 was our best year ever. We handled 4.7 million metric tons [of product] and 268 ships,” said Rick Aschieris, port director for the Port of Stockton. “On top of having a very good business year, we’re doing a lot of work to improve our infrastructure.” That work includes a recently completed overpass over the BNSF Railroad to help keep increased traffic flowing. Navy Drive, the main artery into the Port, is being widened from two to four lanes, and the bridge to Rough and Ready Island is being replaced with a four-lane bridge. Those two projects should be complete around the end of 2018.

Dredging into the river to increase depths has also made it possible to use the docks at full capacity, Aschieris said. With the strengthening and growth comes challenges. One of which is space. According to Pete Grossgart, the Port’s marketing manager, there are only about 620 open acres that are available for development. He foresees that land being fully occupied within 15 years. Currently, occupancy is about 90 percent.

All the activity is refreshing for Port operations. Just 12 years ago, activity had been severely impacted by the Great Recession. “Back in 2006, we had 2.2 million tons of cement come through this facility. The economy tanked, and cement literally dropped to zero for three years,” Grossgart said. “It’s rebounded. I think we did something like 800,000 tons last year. Which just shows the strength of the local economy.”

“The private sector has invested a little more than $2 billion in projects at the Port,” Aschieris said. “We’re employing 5,500 people, though we think that’s a conservative number.”

It doesn’t hurt that the Port of Stockton is very specific in what it offers its tenants, many of whom import or export bulk dry goods, like cement, sulfur and other fertilizers, animal feed and more. There are also commodities such as molasses, food grade oil and steel.

Though steel might have some challenges ahead due to 232 sanctions being considered.

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Airgas to expand CO2 operations to Port of Stockton

By MARC LUTZ
Business Journal Editor
mlutz@cvbizjournal.com

STOCKTON—The Port of Stockton will soon be home to a new Airgas facility that will produce liquid carbon dioxide (CO2).

The plant, which will be located next door to Pacific Ethanol on Navy Drive, is expected to be up and running in the second half of 2018, according to the company.

“[Pacific Ethanol is] producing ethanol, which is produced as an additive for fuel. The process gives off a pretty pure stream of carbon dioxide,” said Pascal Vinet, CEO of Airgas.

Airgas’ facility will focus on the production of CO2 market.

“[Pacific Ethanol] supplies, but not a lot of people know about this industry,” said Vinet.

According to Thoman, the industry is extremely safe because of measures put into place. Airgas is a member of the Compressed Gas Association, which develops the standards used by facilities such as those that produce CO2 products. There are also requirements by places like the Department of Homeland Security and the Food and Drug Administration that Airgas adheres to.

“With these two new production facilities in California, we are continuing to bolster our network of Airgas production facilities throughout the region’s merchant bulk gas market supplying a range of industries including healthcare, chemical, food and beverage, steel, glass, electronics as well as oil and gas industries.”

“The expansion of the existing air separation unit in Etiwanda ... will increase available supply of industrial gases to customers throughout Southern California. The expansion will produce cryogenic liquid nitrogen and oxygen to support the region’s merchant bulk gas market supplying a range of industries including health-care, chemical, food and beverage, steel, glass, electronics as well as oil and gas industries.”

“At the same time it announced the creation of the Port location, Airgas also announced the expansion of its existing facility in Etiwanda, in Southern California. According to a release issued by the company, “The expansion of the existing air separation unit in Etiwanda ... will increase available supply of industrial gases to customers throughout Southern California. The expansion will produce cryogenic liquid nitrogen and oxygen to support the region’s merchant bulk gas market supplying a range of industries including health-care, chemical, food and beverage, steel, glass, electronics as well as oil and gas industries.”

THOMAS said the plans are moving forward and groundbreaking should be happening soon.

Though Airgas has facilities all throughout California, Thomas said the Stockton location will help to bolster its dry ice network.

“Stockton is an important market for us for liquid CO2 and dry ice,” Thomas said.

“When you look at our network, this location is a nice add to this part of the state. This really strengthens our CO2 and dry ice supply network for our customer base in California, which is a growing customer base.

“The products produced at such a facility, Thoman said, are used at water treatment plants, in the food industry for chilling, in the beverage industry for things like putting the fizzle in soda, making beer and wine and for chemical applications since CO2 is a reactant.

“There’s a whole host of things this industry supplies, not a lot of people know about this industry,” Thoman said.

Airgas’ facility will focus on the production of CO2 market.

“We may bring a few folks from other places for experience, but there will be new jobs here,” Thoman said. He said the plans are moving forward and groundbreaking should be happening soon.

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No matter where the product is being handled, whether at the production site, on the road or at the customer’s location, Thomas said they put safety as a top priority.

“That’s the product stewardship we put into all our facilities,” Thomas said.

Airgas not only supplies CO2 products, but gases that are used by industrial, specialty and medical trades. However, the Stockton plant will focus on the CO2 market.

At the same time it announced the creation of the Port location, Airgas also announced the expansion of its existing facility in Etiwanda, in Southern California. According to a release issued by the company, “The expansion of the existing air separation unit in Etiwanda ... will increase available supply of industrial gases to customers throughout Southern California. The expansion will produce cryogenic liquid nitrogen and oxygen to support the region’s merchant bulk gas market supplying a range of industries including health-care, chemical, food and beverage, steel, glass, electronics as well as oil and gas industries.”

“This is a pretty pure stream of carbon dioxide,” said Thoman.

Airgas uses the CO2 to create things like dry ice and other such products. Nationwide, Airgas—which is owned by Air Liquide—serves more than one million customers. The Port facility will employ up to 30 employees in the areas of manufacturing, distribution, and management.

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“With these two new production facilities in California, we are continuing to bolster our network of Airgas production facilities throughout the region in this important and growing market,” said Pascal Vinet, CEO of Airgas in a statement. “The facilities will enhance our supply chain output and fortify long-term reliability for our packaged and merchant gas customers throughout the western United States.”

4512 Feather River Dr., Ste. E • Stockton, CA 95219 Tel (209) 477-0100 Fax (209) 477-0211 Web: www.cvbizjournal.com