

Auntie Anne's owner buys center
 Sam Beiler is selling the pretzel firm, but he has solar plans as landlord of its distribution building

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Sam Beiler is switching from being Auntie Anne's chief executive officer to being its landlord. Beiler, who is selling his company, has bought the City Line Business Center, where Auntie Anne's has a distribution and production building. Through a family partnership, he paid \$9.75 million for the 11-acre tract at Dillerville Road and Manheim Pike, courthouse records show. Beiler is spending another \$4.5 million to put a solar-energy system on the roof of the 93,000-square-foot Auntie Anne's building. More than two acres of solar panels will be installed, making it the city's largest solar installation, he said Wednesday.

"We wanted to find good real estate, make sure it contributes to the community and make sure it's managed as efficiently as possible," Beiler said.

Beiler, who called the Sept. 28 transaction "a long-term investment," bought the property from Thermal Solutions.

Thermal Solutions, a Burnham subsidiary that makes boilers and water heaters, is the property's second-largest occupant, in 44,000 square feet. Other tenants are Autoparts International and Northwest Savings Bank. Only 7,500 square feet in the 160,000-square-foot center is vacant.

City Line, just inside the city limits and across the street from a Sheetz convenience store, stands on the former Nichols Discount City site.

Nichols closed in 1988 after 28 years in business. Later that year, the site was bought by High Associates, which redeveloped the idle parcel.

Burnham bought the property in 1995 for \$8.1 million and constructed a distribution center on the vacant east side of the property the next year.

Later, Burnham transferred ownership to Thermal Solutions and moved the distribution operations to Centerville, then leased the building to Auntie Anne's in 2007.

Auntie Anne's, an international retailer of hand-rolled soft pretzels, uses the building to blend and ship pretzel flour, pack and ship store supplies, and assemble and ship bake-at-home kits.

It also has offices for Auntie Anne's logistics and order-taking staff.

Beiler bought City Line through Shadow Lawn City Line LP, a family partnership he leads.

While Beiler, 45, of Lancaster Township, has bought a major piece of real estate, he's selling a major company.

Beiler, the sole owner, chairman and chief executive officer of Auntie Anne's, is divesting the firm to FOCUS Brands for an undisclosed price.

When the deal is completed next month, Beiler will leave the company he bought five years ago from his distant cousin, founder Anne Beiler.

Beiler, though, is not only the new landlord of Auntie Anne's City Line building.

He'll remain the landlord of Auntie Anne's headquarters at Prince and Chestnut streets, which he owns via a second partnership, Shadow Lawn LFP.

Auntie Anne's has 107 full-time and part-time workers at the corporate headquarters and 167 at the City Line facility.

The one big change that Beiler will make to the newly acquired City Line property is to install a solar-energy array atop the Auntie Anne's building.

"That building works particularly well for solar, because there's nothing impeding the sunlight from the south," he said.

Beiler added that he'll clear unused vent shafts from the roof of the 25-foot-tall structure to make way for more panels.

To be installed by Advanced Solar Industries of New Holland, the system should pay for itself in five or six years, Advanced Solar CEO Josh Mitten said.

In addition, it should produce ongoing six-figure income, he said.

The financial return will result from the system generating more than 1 million kilowatt-hours of electricity annually.

That output will eliminate the purchase of about \$110,000 of electricity a year from a supplier, depending on rates.

It also will be sold to utilities in the form of Solar Renewable Energy Certificates worth another \$350,000 a year, Mitten estimated.

Those ongoing savings and energy certificates, as well as one-time federal and state incentives tied to the purchase of the system, will lead to the speedy payback, he explained.

Handling the City Line property sale were **Dan Berger** of NAI Commercial Partners and Tim Shreiner of Prudential Homesale Services Group.

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