

# New Brunswick

## NJBIZ at 25: Best Projects

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Downtown New Brunswick near the train station today is tough to compare with 25 years ago. (Photo by Aaron Houston)

Here's how one business leader summed it up: if in 1987 you placed a bet on which city — Newark, Trenton or New Brunswick — would be better developed in 25 years, it would have been easy to pick the loser. The Hub City was smaller and had only Johnson & Johnson for corporate investment.

"Everyone would say the third-place finisher will be New Brunswick," the source said. "But in the end, the gold medal goes to New Brunswick."

The redevelopment of New Brunswick has been called "phenomenal," and nearly everyone named it for this list. The leading engine for the revitalization has been the New Brunswick Development Corp., which was founded in the mid-'70s as a public-private partnership. In just the past 25 years, more than \$1 billion has been invested in about three dozen completed Devco projects. In the late '80s, investments included condo developments and theater renovations, with the \$52 million Golden Triangle at the corner of George and Albany streets being the largest project at that time.

In 1994, Christopher J. Paladino joined Devco, becoming its president, and the projects moved to a larger scale: the \$47 million Civic Square I arts building, the \$23 million Liberty Plaza office and retail building, and the \$80 million construction of the Civic Square county administration building and courthouse, to name a few. In the past decade, Devco completed health care buildings, like the \$73 million Child Health Institute of New Jersey, and Rutgers University projects, like the \$55 million Rockoff Hall apartments.

"I can't think of a single nonelected official who has done more in New Jersey" for redevelopment, one business leader said of Paladino. "He's without peers."

Others credited with New Brunswick's revitalization success for the past 25 years include longtime Devco board member George Zoffinger; Devco counsel Anthony Coscia; Mayor Jim Cahill; and John Lynch, former mayor and state senate president.

It's tough to identify a single project as transformative, but one business leader outside the city called the \$120 million Heldrich hotel, condos and retail building, completed in 2007, "a game-changer" for the downtown.

"It created a real 'there,' there across from the theaters," said the expert. "It just framed the downtown."

Now a city often cited as an example of how to do it right, New Brunswick continues its revitalization with the recently completed \$145 million Gateway Transit Village and \$105 million Wellness Plaza, both near the train station, and an estimated \$310 million planned investment for the redevelopment of Rutgers' College Avenue campus. —*Sharon Waters*

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