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PHOTO COURTESY OF HANCE CONSTRUCTION INFOSTORE ONLINE

Alex VanVeldhuisen (left), president and CEO of the Infostore Online, stands in his conference room with Art Hance, president of Hance Construction, the company that built the metal Infostore building.

Hunterdon companies create environmentally friendly complex

By **PAMELA MacKENZIE**
STAFF WRITER

FRENCHTOWN — When Alex Van Veldhuisen, president and chief executive officer of the Infostore Online, decided to build a commercial building on his land in Frenchtown, he had several priorities. One was enough space to house his own business, which includes document storage and scanning, microfilm conversion, certified on-site shredding and online client-access for all documents in his system. In addition, he wanted space for several tenants, all in a building as environmentally friendly as possible. And he wanted to build his own water treatment plant on-site.

Finding a company that could give him all this took research, but Van Veldhuisen found it in Hance Construction, a company started 11 years ago in the Quakertown section of Franklin, Hunterdon County, but now based in Washington, Warren County. Art Hance, the owner, specializes in the design and construction of environmentally friendly metal buildings. He is still extremely active in Hunterdon, and the two men had the same accountant. But what Van Veldhuisen appreciated the most about Hance was the way he proposed to design the building to harmonize with the lay of the land and the angles to the sun, as well as to comply with the building codes in the most advantageous ways.

“When I said I wanted a two-story building, Art was the only one who said, ‘Well, then we can’t make the first story more than 11-and-a-half feet high, because at 12 feet, the code requires you to put a landing in the stairwell.’ That design feature alone saved me thousands of dollars,” Van Veldhuisen said.

He added the key to a successful project like his is that before anything happens, everyone involved in the process has to form an integrated design team. The architect, engineer, heating and cooling company and site contractor need to all work together with the same vision and plan. Hance is the general contractor in

Van Veldhuisen’s team.

Hance designed a U-shaped building on a steel frame, with an east-west orientation, that will be perfect for the solar array Van Veldhuisen will be installing this summer. The first floor has thick masonry outside walls that help support the second story. Inside, the building’s steel frame is largely hidden from view, except in Van Veldhuisen’s conference room, where a steel brace was left exposed as a conversation piece. Hance explained that because the InfoStore’s office is in a corner of the building, it’s home to a specialized brace that bears the weight of the second floor and roof.

“Everybody asks about it,” Van Veldhuisen said.

How can a metal building be more environmentally friendly than other construction? Hance pointed out that steel is one of the most recycled materials in our society. The wall frames, roof and ceilings are all made with steel. His steel buildings are pre-engineered by Butler Architectural Systems, so there is very little waste on-site during construction.

Van Veldhuisen’s and Hance’s first building is the first of four planned on the site. The building sends all its wastewater to on-site water treatment plant, where it is purified and returned to the building as nonpotable water for the toilets and other uses.

But the plant isn’t working at anywhere near capacity yet. To keep it going, Van Veldhuisen’s employees have to add sugar to keep some of the bacteria alive. However, Hance will be building three more commercial buildings on the site before it’s complete. And, Frenchtown will be building some of its affordable housing units on the property, up on Route 12, because there will still be capacity left at the water treatment plant, even with all the commercial buildings.

“We’ll save more than two million gallons of water when we’ve built everything,” Van Veldhuisen said. “That’s very satisfying.”