

Best and the rest for the past week

Connecticut Post Staff

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Thumbs up to Sun Products Corp. for placing its North American Technology Center in Trumbull and its new headquarters in Wilton. The establishment of these two new locations will create approximately 120 jobs, and about 35 of these will deal with research and development for the laundry detergent manufacturer. Sun premiered last year in a merger of Unilever North American's laundry care business and Huish Detergents Inc. Some of its products include All, Wisk and Snuggle, as well as other household cleaners. The state will be giving the corporation, which has profits of approximately \$2 billion per year, a \$1.5 million loan and tax credits for its new locations in Fairfield County. In this time of national economic crunch, Sun's plans to open up two new facilities provide a sense of promise for the job market. The firm plans to move into the Wilton headquarters in late March. Former Unilever research centers and corporate offices in Trumbull and Stamford will be expanded, and product development will continue.

Thumbs up to Alberta Vargas for organizing the Silver Lining Prom Dress Expo, which collects donated prom dresses and gives them away free of charge. This is the program's third year, but it is the first in which the lower Naugatuck Valley will be able to participate. The original price tags on the gowns range from \$89 to \$449, said Vargas, and although they may be obtained for free, a \$10 donation is encouraged. Some dresses even have yet to be worn, including 150 brand new sample gowns that the program has received. With the depressing state of the current economy, this year could possibly be Silver Lining's biggest success. Vargas expects many of those students browsing to be not only from the lower and middle classes, but also the upper middle class. "This is the answer to a prayer for many of them," she said, "and we expect more and more people to come." Meral B. Prewitt, regional coordinator for Covenant to Care for Children, a statewide organization that aids children up to age 18, works with social workers who bring girls to the dress event. Thanks to Vargas's initiative and dedication to this project, many young women will feel like princesses at their proms, despite tough economic situations.

Thumbs up to Jim Calhoun, the University of Connecticut's men's basketball coach, for reaching a milestone. In a week that saw him making headlines for other reasons, the cantankerous Calhoun further cemented his Hall of Fame credentials by earning his 800th win, only the seventh Division I coach in history to reach that mark. And he did it in thrilling fashion, as his Huskies beat an outstanding Marquette team on the road thanks to maybe the best game guard A.J. Price has put together during his time in Storrs. Calhoun isn't out to make friends on the job, but his performance is unsurpassed. In addition to a pair of national titles, the job he's done with this year's squad -- which just two seasons ago might have been his worst team ever -- and molding it into a championship contender has been superb. As far as plenty of state residents are concerned, he's earning his pay and then some.

Thumbs up to Black Rock Library in Bridgeport for finally being in the homestretch to reopening. The branch was closed in 2003 for renovations, but state aid did not begin to flow until 2007 for the rehab work. Major work was completed this week to accommodate a Mardi Gras festivities prelude to a later opening. This past Tuesday, those who attended the celebration had the opportunity to observe the progress of the \$4 million renovation. Those anxious for the reopening have a bit of time to wait, however, until the library is fully up and running. Equipment remains to be set up by library staff, and work on the building must be fully completed. According to City Librarian Scott Hughes, the system is also encountering staffing problems because of the budget crisis. Hughes noted that hours will most likely have to be reduced systemwide, and workers might have to be assigned to an alternate branch. Although those obstacles remain, it's obvious that citizens of Black Rock want their library back as a community gathering place. The branch's reopening is well overdue.