

BACK TO SCHOOL?

■ **Dowling campus buyer** proposes Oakdale college

■ **Needs Islip zoning OK;** info meeting set Tuesday

BY RACHELLE BLIDNER
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Dowling College's Oakdale campus would be operated as a college again and designated an Islip Town landmark district under a draft proposal by its new owner.

Mercury International LLC applied last month to change the zoning of the shuttered 25-acre campus from a residential use "to allow for other uses," said Don Cook, the company's director of operations.

Dowling College, which closed in 2016 after running out of funds and losing accreditation, operated as a private liberal arts school in an Oakdale residential zone with Islip Town special use permits. Those permits were not transferrable in the property's sale, according to Dowling's website.

"We want to do a college but it's not permitted right now," Cook said Monday in an interview that appears to be the first one discussing Mercury's plans for the property. He declined to elaborate, citing a planned informational meeting open to the public Tuesday.

Mercury would need to obtain a special permit from the town planning board to operate as a degree-granting school, Islip spokeswoman Caroline Smith said.

"I'm pleased that Mercury has



Mercury International LLC has applied to change zoning to permit a new college at the former Dowling College in Oakdale.

set up this meeting with the community to share their vision, and elicit feedback from the neighbors," Islip Supervisor Angie Carpenter said in a statement.

Mercury has not yet submitted an application with the state Board of Regents to operate a college, a state education official said Monday. The board has temporarily stopped accepting applications statewide for degree-granting authority while it revises the process to handle a growing number of groups seeking to open educational institutions, according to a state educa-

tion department document.

Mercury International of Delaware is affiliated with Hong Kong-based NCF Capital Ltd., which purchased the property for \$26.1 million in August after Dowling filed for bankruptcy.

Dowling's Brookhaven campus in Shirley was auctioned off last week with no announced winner after the top bid hit \$10.2 million.

Mercury's zone change application includes a planned landmark preservation overlay district over part of the campus, including the Idle Hour mansion

and the performing arts building, Cook said.

Cook said in a letter to campus neighbors that the overlay "would permit specific adaptive interior reuses in order to preserve these architecturally significant structures." The campus' rec center was not included because it is undergoing structural evaluation, and the company did not purchase the campus security building, he wrote.

The Oakdale Historical Society has advocated to preserve the 110-room Idle Hour mansion, which was rebuilt in the

early 1900s after a fire destroyed the original.

Maryann Almes, the society's president, said she wants to learn more about Mercury's plans and make sure company officials know the history of the property. "It's the jewel in our community, and we need to keep it protected," she said.

Mercury officials will hold a meeting Tuesday to make "sure the residents are comfortable with the process" of the zone change at Town Hall West auditorium, 401 Main St. in Islip, from 5 to 7 p.m., Cook said.

Frontier Airlines to end 2 Florida routes from MacArthur

BY VALERIE BAUMAN
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Frontier Airlines officials said Monday that flights from Long Island MacArthur Airport to Miami and Fort Myers, Florida, will be discontinued effective April 8.

Officials said that they made the change because the routes were not popular enough to continue. A spokesman for Frontier

did not know if or when the Florida flights would ever return.

"They just weren't meeting our expectations," airline spokesman Richard Oliver III said Monday.

The announcement comes less than a week after Frontier said it will end flights from MacArthur to New Orleans on March 5.

Islip Town officials did not immediately respond to requests

for comment, other than to say they expected to announce later this week new routes that Frontier would be bringing to the Ronkonkoma airport.

Levittown resident Rosemary Costabile said she was disappointed that Frontier didn't give the Florida routes more time to take off before canceling the flights.

"I'm frustrated," she said. "I wish more people would get on

the bandwagon and see how easy it is to fly out of there."

She said the change throws a wrench in plans for her husband's 60th birthday later this year — they had been checking regularly for Frontier flights they could purchase to Florida using the company's air miles.

"We were really planning to buy property down there, so it would have been ideal [to use the Miami or Fort Myers route]

to go back and forth," Costabile said.

The regional airport has seen a significant financial turnaround in recent years, ending 2017 with a nearly \$3 million surplus.

The improved financial standing helped attract Frontier Airlines to the Islip Town-owned airport last August, a move that had been projected to bring in \$2.8 million in revenue in 2018.