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MERCER COUNTY

Reinhardt's to sell realty operations

By Michael Rognick
Herald Business Editor

ERA Johnson Real Estate Inc. has reached a deal to buy the real estate business from Reinhardt's Agency Inc., the companies said.

No terms of the deal were disclosed. The sale is expected to be completed on Friday.

Reinhardt's will continue operating the insurance side of its business, said Ryan Tyson, Reinhardt's president. His father, Michael, had overseen the real estate business operations until retiring earlier this year.

"Our insurance operation has grown significantly over the past 10 years and we want to focus on that," Tyson said.

As part of the deal, seven Realtors from Reinhardt's will be going to ERA Johnson and will be housed at the agency's

Hermitage office, said Walt Johnson, owner of the real estate agency.

Johnson said Reinhardt's and ERA Johnson have a similar philosophy which made for a smooth sale.

"We're not driven by the numbers like other big companies in the area," he said.

The addition of the new Realtors will give a boost to the agency's commercial real estate sales, Johnson added.

As a result of the sale ERA Johnson will employ about 25.

Reinhardt's was founded in 1904 while ERA Johnson was created in 1912, making the two businesses among the oldest locally-owned enterprises in Mercer County.

In addition to its Hermitage office, ERA Johnson has an office in Mercer. Reinhardt's has offices in Sharon and Hermitage.

WTO probing U.S. claims of counterfeiting by China

GENEVA (AP) — The World Trade Organization opened a formal investigation Tuesday into allegations that China is providing a haven for product piracy and counterfeiting, the most far-reaching of four current trade disputes between Washington and Beijing.

The U.S. complaint over China's enforcement of intellectual property rights is the culmination of years of agitation in Washington and elsewhere over one of the world's biggest sources of illegally copied goods, ranging from DVDs, CDs and designer clothes to sporting goods and medications.

"The United States recognizes that China has made the protection of intellectual property rights a priority and that China has taken active steps to improve ... protection and enforcement," U.S. trade official Dan Hunter told the WTO's dispute settlement body.

But Beijing has not done enough, Hunter said. He added that consultations between the two countries failed to resolve U.S. concerns, making the establishment of a WTO investigative panel necessary.

Beijing heavily criticized

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Washington earlier this year for starting the case, saying it could damage trade relations between the countries.

The case could have ramifications for American industries, from Hollywood to Silicon Valley, in determining how they combat piracy.

Lu Xiankun, a Chinese trade official, said Friday that the U.S. legal action was regrettable and that China would defend its interests before the global commerce body. China strongly opposes U.S. attempts to impose regulations that go beyond what is required by the WTO, Lu told the WTO's dispute body.

The WTO panel's scope will be limited to whether Beijing has taken sufficient action to protect intellectual property rights, but it could ultimately authorize U.S. trade sanctions against China worth billions of dollars annually — the amount the U.S. claims its companies lose because of China's lax enforcement. Such a panel often takes years to reach a final decision.

The U.S. government has brought a series of complaints to the global commerce body since last year amid pressure

from Congress to do something about America's soaring trade deficits and lost manufacturing jobs, which critics blame in part on unfair trade practices by foreign nations.

The U.S. trade deficit set a record for the fifth consecutive year in 2006 at \$758.5 billion. The imbalance with China grew to \$232.5 billion, the highest ever with a single country.

A WTO panel is examining a complaint by the United States and the 27-nation European Union on whether China maintains an illegal tax system to block imports of foreign-made auto parts into China.

Sugar-free gum can be beneficial, dental group says

CHICAGO (AP) — The nation's largest dentist group now says gum can be good for you, as long as it's sugar-free.

The American Dental Association said Tuesday it has awarded its seal of acceptance to Wrigley sugar-free gums Orbit, Extra and Eclipse — based on studies funded at least partially by the maker of Wrigley gums, Chicago-based Wm. Wrigley Jr. Co.

It's the first time the ADA has allowed its seal to appear on gum after clearing it for thousands of other products since 1930.

The ADA said its independent review of the studies confirms those three gums have been shown to help prevent cavities, reduce plaque acid and strengthen teeth.

It said studies submitted by Wrigley showed that chewing those gum products for 20 minutes three times a day after meals increases saliva production. Saliva, the ADA said, helps neutralize and wash away plaque acid and bathes the teeth in minerals such as calcium, phosphate and fluoride, which are known to strengthen tooth enamel and help prevent cavities.

Clifford Whall, director of the ADA seal of acceptance program, said its council on scientific affairs found the studies, which focused solely on Wrigley products, had followed scientific principles.

"The council has looked at the body of data and concluded that there are some health benefits to chewing these products three times a day for 20 minutes," he said.

Wrigley paid \$36,000 to submit its evaluation material — \$12,000 per product. ADA also said Wrigley spends \$35,000 to \$45,000 in exhibit booth space at its annual meeting, advertising in its publications and on other sponsorships. It also pays \$25,000 to help sponsor an ADA health screening program.

Consumer advocate Peter Lurie said the dental association should test other products before issuing such a seal, with the system appearing to be biased in favor of large companies that can afford the clinical studies.

"As long as the testing process and the criteria for receipt of a seal is unclear, the exact meaning of the ADA's seal will remain obscure," said Lurie, deputy director of the Health Research Group at Public Citizen, the nonprofit consumer advocacy group founded by Ralph Nader.

Whall said the program exists solely to inform consumers and dentists about

whether products do what their manufacturers say they do. The seal currently appears on various toothpaste, dental floss and oral rinse products.

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