



[Home](#)
[Talk To Us](#)
[Search](#)
[Site Map](#)

[About WCPN](#)
[Program Schedules](#)
[Listen Live](#)
[WCPN Archives](#)
[Program Highlights](#)
[Major Underwriters](#)

[Listener Support](#)
[WCPN in the Community](#)
[Public NewsRoom](#)
[Public Arts](#)

Steelyard Commons Update

Aired December 12, 2006

It's been a while since we heard the last salvos fired in the battle between local shopkeepers, city hall, and Wal-Mart. But on the near west side of Cleveland, the one-million-square-foot retail development called Steelyard Commons is nearly completed - and despite initial objections, will include a Wal-Mart Supercenter. ideastream's Rick Jackson recently went to the site just south of MetroHealth Medical Center to talk with developers about their progress. He found there's much more going on than the building of a Wal-mart store.

[Listen to the MP3](#)

Just two months from the grand opening of the largest open air shopping center in Cuyahoga County, much of the furor over Steelyard Commons has died down, even as the final phase of construction ramps up

If you're not a regular traveler of the northbound side of the Jennings Freeway, and have not seen the project being built, its' sheer size will be a shock. 90 feet downhill from the highway, Steelyard Commons sprawls across 125 acres which formerly housed the Number 2 finishing mill of Mittal Steel, or LTV to many of us. Hundreds of workmen fanned out across the site, which is nearing completion, with a main structure that measures a half-mile across.

Now, it won't be long before the sounds of price check scanners and the smells of chain restaurant food fill the air that once carried the sounds and smells of American steel production. This type of transformation has been a dream of developer, and Cleveland native, Mitchell Schneider

Mitchell Schneider: I believe in Cleveland, and to have an opportunity to do our small share of helping the city of Cleveland, at the core of Northeastern Ohio, and its' economic vitality is really something that we have a great opportunity in, and feel honored to have had the opportunity to participate in

An honor not easily acquired. Much of the past six years have been laced with accusations against Schneider's company, First Interstate Properties, and former Mayor Campbell's office. Critics feared that this development would disgrace the history of the site, and that the coming of big box stores and a shopping mall would destroy the cozy ways of life in nearby Tremont, and Ohio City. Schneider has been working overtime to change those perceptions - and says it was as hard as clearing the two million square feet of steel-making buildings, then excavating the land.

Mitchell Schneider: We've had on-going talks with the Tremont West Development Corporation, with other community groups within Tremont, Ohio City and other neighborhoods. You know, the fact is, there's a huge amount of retail dollars being spent outside of this area at these stores. So what we're trying to do here is to say for Cleveland residents, rather than having to go to North Olmstead, or to Parma, or to Avon, or to Cleveland Heights, why not spend your retail dollars in Cleveland and support Cleveland? So most of the dollars that will be spent here are dollars that otherwise would be spent at the same retailers, not at the shops in Tremont or Ohio City or the other neighborhoods around here.

He pointedly reiterates that the \$120 million invested come from his firm, and from companies like The Home Depot, Best Buy, Staples, and Target, which are building stores here - without any subsidy from the city, county or state - though there are federal tax credits involved.

Schneider has a bag full of other selling points: the money to be generated for Cleveland schools, the jobs to be

created, and the veneration being paid to the men who used to work in this place. That last point includes several elements. A museum is being placed here, built in a 500-square-foot renovated brick building that once served as the time clock house for the 12,000 men who worked in this plant. Here's First Interstate Director of Design Kevin Zak.

Kevin Zak: That steelyard heritage center is really serving two purposes: one, identifying the steel making process, to break it down into laymen's terms so that the public can see how that's done; and then secondly to really talk about why that's important to Cleveland and the families that it touched in terms of making steel in the Cleveland area.

The preservation of the memory of the steelyard extends outside the museum where a gigantic molten steel ladle sits, given to the project by Mittal Steel, as was a 260-foot long, 55-ton steel utility bridge, which will serve as a gateway to the shopping center's north end.

Richard Carlisle: We thought that the bridge was a unique element and would give us a character unlike anything else that we could even build here.

The character of the development also includes the addition of a major portion of Ohio's 110-mile-long Tow Path Trail, nearly completed now from Cleveland south to New Philadelphia. Director of Development; Richard Carlisle.

Richard Carlisle: We've put in almost two miles of the Tow Path trail through the site and accommodated the tow path so you can cross the whole site without crossing any vehicular driveways or roadways. We've built two tunnels on the north side of the project, one under the Quigley connector and one under Steelyard Drive, so that the people that are enjoying the path won't have to cross a grade at a traffic.

The hope is also that travelers on the trail might stop in from time to time, whether for a meal, a doughnut, or an MP3 player for their hike.

With studies showing Cleveland is an underserved retail market, Mitchell Schneider says this center will fill a good portion of that gap while supplying an estimated 6,000 new permanent jobs. The Steelyard Commons development is targeting as its primary customer base, the 320,000 people who live five miles east and west of the site, and about two miles south, then north to Lake Erie. We'll begin to be able to measure its success when the Home Depot opens February. Several more stores are set to open by Memorial Day. The Wal-Mart Supercenter is not scheduled to open till September. Rick Jackson, 90.3.

[Home](#) | [About WCPN](#) | [Program Schedules](#) | [Listen Live](#) | [WCPN Archives](#) | [Support WCPN](#) | [Member News & Events](#)
[WCPN in the Community](#) | [Program Highlights](#) | [Search](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact WCPN](#)
Copyright © 2008 ideastream® All rights reserved. 90.3 WCPN ideastream® | 1375 Euclid Avenue | Cleveland, Ohio | 44115

SmartBusiness

THE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL FOR CORPORATE GROWTH

[Print](#) [Close Window](#)

Constructing a solution

Several area developers believe they hold the key to revitalizing Cleveland.

By Anne-Margaret Sobota

The city of Cleveland, while once a thriving metropolis, is now struggling to attract new people and businesses. In the past few decades, most of its residents have migrated to the suburbs, leaving businesses in downtown to languish.

It has become a paradox, really. Without a core population, there was no reason to build new housing, and downtown businesses closed and moved to the suburbs like most of the city's inhabitants. But now, without inviting housing and retail, the city is having trouble drawing people back to its core.

It's a problem city officials and area real estate developers are determined to fix.

Critical mass

"If you listen to what everyone is talking about and read between the lines, it's a vision of an active, more metropolitan central city than what we're experiencing today," says Mitchell Schneider, president of First Interstate Properties Ltd. in Beachwood. "Whether it's 24/7 or not a 24/7 city, it certainly has a lot of room to grow in the direction toward a core, urban, metropolitan, inviting city."

Schneider, who developed Avon Commons and Legacy Village, and who is developing Steelyard Commons, a large, multitenant shopping center in West Tremont, says the key to revitalization lies in getting a critical mass of occupants in the core city through residential development.

"I think that without a critical mass of residents—I'm talking more than 20,000, and it perhaps might need to be 30,000 as a foundation to grow from—that it will be very unlikely that the core city will have an opportunity to flourish beyond what it is today," he says.

With a firm inner-city population in place, Schneider believes the retail side of the core downtown will be able to prosper again.

"It creates opportunities for different kinds of retail to take place at the first floor level, at the street level," he says. "I think that it then allows for the creation of small businesses that would have an office in the core city as opposed to in the suburbs, and that it really allows for all the components of our overall daily activities to come together so that we might envision a city where you don't have to leave the city in order to have all of your basic goods and services."

It's an idea echoed by other Cleveland developers, including Developers Diversified Realty Corp. CEO Scott Wolstein, who has a \$240-million plan to revitalize the Flats.

In order to bring back the streetscapes with vibrant retail, you have to have enough population that lives in the city to supplement the commuter population," says Wolstein. "It's very difficult to support retail with just people who come and go to work every day. I think if we had a more significant urban populace, there's no question that you could see the same kind of retail return to the city that you now only find in the suburban malls."

If you build it

While bringing a critical mass of people back to the city is necessary to draw businesses downtown, Schneider and several other developers realize it's also necessary to create and build new retail to draw

those people back to the city in the first place.

"When coming into an area . . . everybody looks at the schools, but almost second, everybody wants to know where there's convenient shopping," says Schneider. "How far do I have to drive to get the stuff that I want or need? I think [what] Steelyard Commons does for downtown is that it really helps to support a decision to move downtown. It removes one of the barriers, because for all of your basic goods and needs right now, those Cleveland residents, by and large, need to drive out of the city to go to a shopping center. Now, literally, within a five-minute ride from their home — closer than most suburbanites have it — you can be at the Target, you can be at the Wal-Mart . . . and all of those things that are so convenient to do in suburban life will now be very easy to do if you want to make the choice to live downtown."

But even more important than new retail is the need for new, attractive housing, says Gordon Priemer, president and founder of Heartland Developers.

"You've got to have housing," Priemer says. "You have to have all kinds of housing, whether it's loft, single-family or townhomes. You're not going to get jobs unless you have places that are fun and exciting for people to live."

Priemer's company is working on several developments in Warrensville Heights, Ohio City and Slavic Village that it hopes will attract young professionals to Greater Cleveland. Heartland's developments are planned to offer people what Priemer has learned homebuyers want: green areas and landscaping, easy access, closeness of shopping, newness and bright, open spaces.

With Priemer's newest project, the Lofts of Avalon Station, he hopes to stress the importance of transit-oriented development — development that is planned around public transportation hubs to provide quick, easy access to other parts of the city — and he expects that idea to rub off on the Euclid Corridor project.

The 200-loft unit in Shaker Heights will be within walking distance of the Avalon Station RTA stop. The \$60-million project is also within walking distance of popular retail spots and will have all the quality and amenities that today's young homebuyers are looking for.

"People want nice surroundings. One of the things that I see happening more and more [is] people want quality," Priemer says. "And they're willing to pay. . . . They want that quality of life."

"We need to keep young people, and that's how we do it. We have nice housing, nice quality of life. If it's a dismal place to live, you're not going to work here. You'll go find some other place."

And as Wolstein points out, it's an opportune time to create this type of housing.

"Demographically in the United States today, most new household formation is couples without children — it's either baby boomers who have become empty nesters or it's echo boomers who are having their children later in life and don't have children yet of school age," says Wolstein. "So the traditional impediment to living in the city, which has been a general feeling that the suburban school systems provided a better education, is no longer an issue for most people looking for a new home."

"And that gives cities like Cleveland — and really, all cities in the United States — an opportunity to really attract people to live in the city without having to worry about things like that."

Loose ends

While attracting people, and thus businesses, to downtown is the central component to a rebirth of Cleveland, there are other issues that remain critical to building a positive image of the city and strong self-esteem.

Bob Stark, CEO of Stark Enterprises, sees a need to rethink and redevelop the port of entry into the community — Cleveland Hopkins Airport.

"One of the things that is obviously missing in that regard is a terminal experience," says Stark. "I think part of that went away when the security issues separated what was once considered the terminal portion of the airport from most of the public. But I think we must build a new terminal experience that you enter when you are arriving from out of state or when you are leaving the area that reinforces a very strong image and identity of Cleveland."

I'd like to see a terminal [like] the type that you walk into when you go to places like Denver or a million

great cities, where there's a large, open space with great architecture and lots of retail — almost like a mall environment — that's active and forward-thinking. It makes an impression. It's designed to create a strong identity statement."

Although Stark believes the progress made by other developers is a step in the right direction, he sees the need for something on a much larger scale. Instead of rebuilding an old city, he believes in creating a completely new one and would like to build on the success of his Crocker Park and Eton Chagrin Boulevard projects.

"The experience of doing mixed-use (development) ... has proven that there is a demand for mixed-use density lifestyle that is much greater than the supply, and that no suburban location could ever satisfy it either in quantity or quality," he says. "The only answer to satisfying that demand lies in the urban center. And now that we have an example, a model, a laboratory experiment if you will ... we can take those truths that have been uncovered there, those principles, and we can apply them in much bigger scale and build a new downtown."

How to reach: Heartland Developers, www.heartlanddevelopers.com; Developers Diversified Realty, www.ddr.com; First Interstate Properties Ltd, www.first-interstate.com; Stark Enterprises, www.starkenterprises.com

Smart Business Network | Copyright © 2008 All Rights Reserved