

The Courier

A COMPLEX MAN: Developer John Domo is the driving force behind 2 new retail complexes on the east side

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Time to put on those thinking caps. What do a mansion renovation, an upscale condominium development, and a retail shopping complex have in common? Answer: The creative vision of developer John Domo of Chagrin Falls.

Domo, largely unknown in the Findlay area, is the man responsible for the latest transformation of the city's eastside landscape. I believe retail can be fairly creative, Domo said recently while enjoying the surroundings of one of the establishments he has brought to town Buffalo Wild Wings Grill and Bar.

Born and raised in the Cleveland suburb of Garfield Heights and a graduate of Cleveland State University with a degree in accounting, Domo is the driving force behind the development of both the Flag City Center and Legacy Corner retail complexes located along either side of U.S. 224 East.

At Flag City Center, Menards, an Eau Claire, Wis.-based home improvement retailer, is readying its 200,000-square-foot operation. A spring opening is scheduled. Already open for business as part of Flag City Center is a First Federal Bank branch office, and the Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant.

At nearby Legacy Corner, a Walgreens drug store and an International House of Pancakes (IHOP) restaurant have been built, with IHOP already open for business. Construction of an Olive Garden Italian Restaurant also is scheduled to get under way soon at Legacy Corner.

If you're motivated, you can make something happen, Domo said. But, he added, It takes hard work and perseverance.

Domo's baptism into the real estate world began on a part-time basis when he got his real estate license to earn some extra money while working as a controller for Diamond Shamrock, a business conglomerate in Cleveland.

After leaving that firm, Domo's first actual taste of development came in 1978 when he converted about 150 apartments into condominiums at Breckville's Carriage Hill. Brecksville is a south suburb of Cleveland.

Following that, Domo began his first major undertaking, called Le Marin on Catawba Island. To accomplish this project, which involved 120 condominiums and 90 boat harbors, Domo said he had to get a 35-acre former Girl Scouts camp rezoned. He noted that this project, which took place around 1980, coincided with the revitalization of Lake Erie.

I've been involved in creative, substantial projects, Domo said when asked about his background. Perhaps his most notable achievement to date is a development called Newport in Bratenahl, near Cleveland. Domo said when he started this project; Bratenahl had not seen any new development for 18 years. First, Domo had to acquire seven different estates, including the Howard Hanna estate and the Samuel Mather estate. It took two years in the mid-1980s to assemble the land, Domo explained. After that, it took another two years to obtain all the necessary approvals and another two years to get the final plans and marketing together.

But after breaking ground in 1990, the result is a 150-home development with 116 boat slips. Domo said the single-family homes, varying in style from English country homes to townhomes to detached garden cottage homes and attached ranches, range from \$400,000 to \$5 million. Boat slips sell from \$55,000 to \$250,000.

An integral part of this development is the Shoreby Club, a private, equity-owned club located on the former Mather summer estate in Bratenahl. The main social quarters of the Shoreby Club is the 23-room mansion built in 1890 by Mather. It's this mansion and grounds, which overlook the Lake Erie shoreline and Newport Harbor, which Domo had to completely renovate.

As the Newport project neared completion in the late 1990s, Domo said he started to turn his sights on building an apartment portfolio. He said he felt the future was in the middle markets providing upscale housing and better retail developments.

The city of Findlay (along with other communities such as Marion and Ontario, near Mansfield), met these requirements and Domo set about looking for available local land. He acquired about 20 acres along Hancock County Road 236 and The Arbors of Findlay was constructed.

As I got more acquainted with the community, Domo said of Findlay, I found it to be one of the best mid-size towns in all of Ohio. I felt vitality here; It's a good-looking clean city.

Domo then began investigating other real estate possibilities, eventually acquiring the land which now bears the name Flag City Center.

I felt there was an opportunity here for retail, Domo said, adding that he doesn't rely on any outside consultants to help him make decisions.

Initially, Domo had plans for a Home Depot store to anchor the Flag City Center, but when those plans fell through, he quickly regrouped and landed Menards. In addition to what's already built at Flag City Center, Domo said he is working on a landing a couple of other restaurants on that site's out lots. He also has plans for a 24,000-square-foot strip mall which would front Patriot Drive leading to Menards. Domo hopes to have all of the first phase available lots sold by the first half of this year, and built out by 2005. Domo said the first phase development of Flag City Center consists of 27 acres. The project is going according to plan, Domo said, maybe even better. We got a lot accomplished in a short period of time.

As for Legacy Corner, not only will it boast a Walgreens, an IHOP, and an Olive Garden, but Domo said an 80,000-square-foot strip mall will be built. Domo said it will be a lifestyle center, being more fashion-oriented with national clothing and shoe stores.

Asked about Findlay's ability to support more retail, Domo said, it's all about timing. If the housing and job markets continue to grow, so will retail, especially with good retail users.

As to the future, more development by Domo is possible. He said he is continuing to work with landowner Gerald Johnson on additional acreage located north of the Flag City Center.

After all, as Domo said, with hard work and perseverance, you can make something happen.

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