

BUSINESS

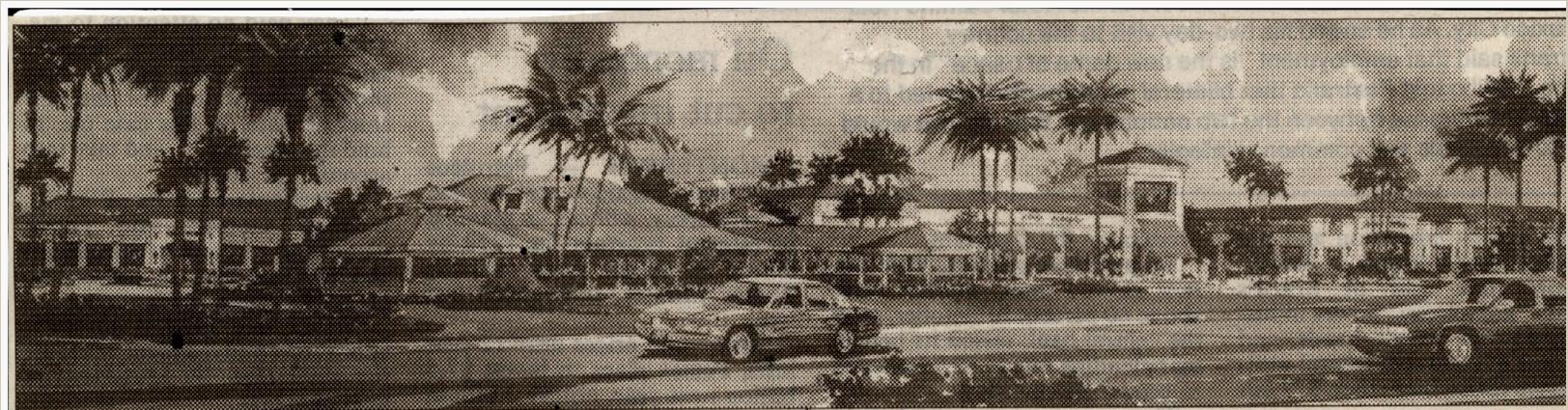
SECTION

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The Herald



Project will include shops, movies, houses Kendall tract set for development

By **ELAINE WALKER**
Herald Business Writer

Developing a 37-acre tract of land on Kendall Drive just west of Florida's Turnpike has turned into a career for Jeff Berkowitz.

Over the last decade, the Miami developer has had to scrap his plans at least three times because of community opposition, bureaucratic hurdles, financing problems and difficulty securing tenants.

The end is finally in sight for Berkowitz. He expects to begin construction early next year on Kendall Village Center, a project that will include shops, restaurants, a megaplex movie theater, other entertainment activities, an office tower, townhomes and possibly a hotel.

"We made it," said Berkowitz, 50. "I knew I would get here. The question is whether I'd be old and doddering by the time it happened. Now I'm just old, not doddering."

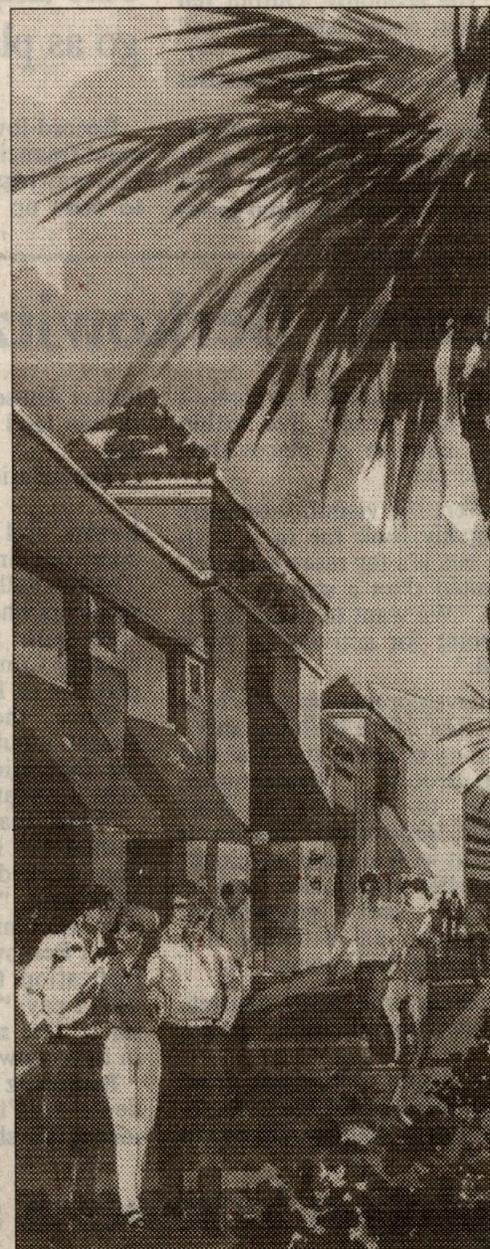
Unlike the 10-dealer auto mall that Berkowitz and partner Alan Potamkin first planned for the site, the \$50 million village will cater to the nearby community.

The first tenants to sign leases for the center's 262,500 square feet of retail space are a 16-screen Regal Cinemas with all stadium seating; On the Border, a Mexican restaurant by the owners of Chili's; and LA Fitness gym.

"We think this is one of most exciting markets as far as the area's demographics and visibility," said Paul Norris, chief financial officer for LA Fitness; which has a gym in Coral Springs and another under construction in Pembroke Pines.

Other possible tenants: Bahama Breeze, a Caribbean-style seafood restaurant by the owners of the Olive Garden; Wild Oats supermarket; Starlite

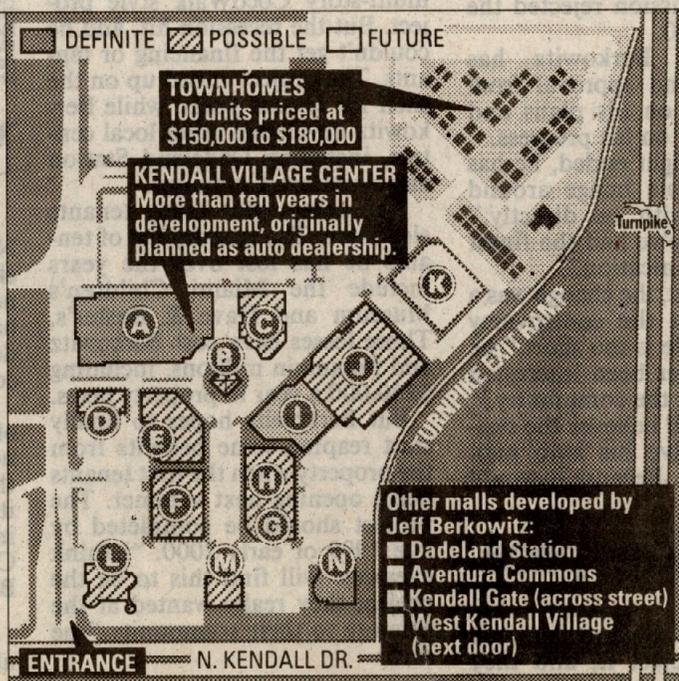
PLEASE SEE KENDALL, 2C



KENDALL VILLAGE CENTER PLANNED

Developer Jeff Berkowitz and his partner auto mogul Alan Potamkin have spent more than a decade trying to develop this 37-acre tract of land in Kendall near the Florida Turnpike. They expect to begin construction just after the first of the year.

- A. Regal Cinemas
- B. Civic Pavilion
- C. Office tower
- D. Starlite Diner
- E. Chuck E. Cheese restaurant
- F. Wild Oats
- G. Restaurant or retail
- H. Restaurant or retail
- I. Just For Feet footwear
- J. L.A. Fitness health club
- K. Possible future extended-stay type hotel
- L. Bahama Breeze restaurant
- M. Restaurant or retail space
- N. On The Border restaurant



STEP BY STEP: Construction on Kendall Village Center is expected to begin early next year.

With Kendall Center, Berkowitz nears cherished goal

KENDALL, FROM 1C

Diner; Just for Feet; Chuck E. Cheese; Gap; Johnny Rocket's; and an entertainment center similar to Dave & Buster's.

For anyone who has had to fight for a parking space or wait two hours for a table at the Kendallgate center across the street, which Berkowitz also owns, these new businesses will be welcome.

"What he is developing are things people will use," said Miles Moss, past president of the Kendall Federation of Homeowner Associations and president of the Winston Park homeowners association. "It's going to be a very nice addition to the area. It's not going to attract outsiders. It's just going to serve those people already in the area."

Berkowitz envisions Kendall Village as a cross between Mizner Park in Boca Raton and a traditional neighborhood shopping center. Built around a Mediterra-

nean square, the idea is to create a village where people live within walking distance of places they work and play.

"It offers the visibility retailers traditionally look for in a strip center, but it's far more pedestrian-oriented than a strip center," he said. "We want to make this a focal point for activity in West Kendall."

The development plans include a four-story office building and a community of about 100 two- and three-bedroom townhomes, expected to sell for at least \$150,000. Berkowitz is close to an agreement with another developer to build the townhomes, and he plans to seek government approval for an extended-stay hotel of up to 150 rooms.

Real estate and retail analysts think the combination makes sense.

"This is one of the last great sites out there," said Larry Suchman, a Coral Gables real-estate

broker whose family sold Berkowitz the land more than a decade ago.

The relationship between Ber-

kowitz and the community has come full circle in the last decade. The Kendall Federation led angry residents who fought the proposed auto park for years, until the County Commission rejected the plan 5-4 in 1990.

Since then, Berkowitz has sought input and approval from the federation on his plans and kept it updated on his progress.

"Since that fight ended, he has turned his whole image around and worked with us directly," Moss said. "We've had the finest level of communication."

For Berkowitz, the change was a realization that the controversy didn't pay. "Life is too short," he said. "I've never been interested in fighting with the community."

Berkowitz still believes the residents didn't give his auto mall idea a fair shot. Because it would

have been hidden from view by a wall of trees and generated a limited amount of traffic, he believes it would not have been as intrusive as they predicted.

"It should have been an ideal neighbor," he said. "But I ran into a prejudice against auto dealers."

When the auto mall failed, Berkowitz first attempted to build a multi-story CocoWalk style project. But the recession hit, and he couldn't get the financing or tenants. The project ended up on the shelf for several years, while Berkowitz developed other local centers, including Dadeland Station and Aventura Commons.

The delays sent many tenants elsewhere. The laundry list of tenants he has lost over the years include the Miami Children's Museum and Dave & Buster's. Those losses have cost Berkowitz and Potamkin millions, including \$250,000 a year in property taxes.

But Berkowitz hopes to finally start reaping some benefits from the property when the first tenants begin opening next summer. The project should be completed by late 1999 or early 2000. "I think everyone will find this to be the project they really wanted at the gateway to their community," he said.