



TIM CHAPMAN/HERALD STAFF

**AT LAST:** Jeff Berkowitz has been trying to develop his tract in West Kendall for 13 years. The shopping center is becoming a gathering place for community residents.

# PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

# West Kendall plan at last a reality for developers

BY ELAINE WALKER  
ewalker@herald.com

It might have been easier for Jeff Berkowitz to give up on plans to develop his 37-acre tract on Kendall Drive, just west of Florida's Turnpike.

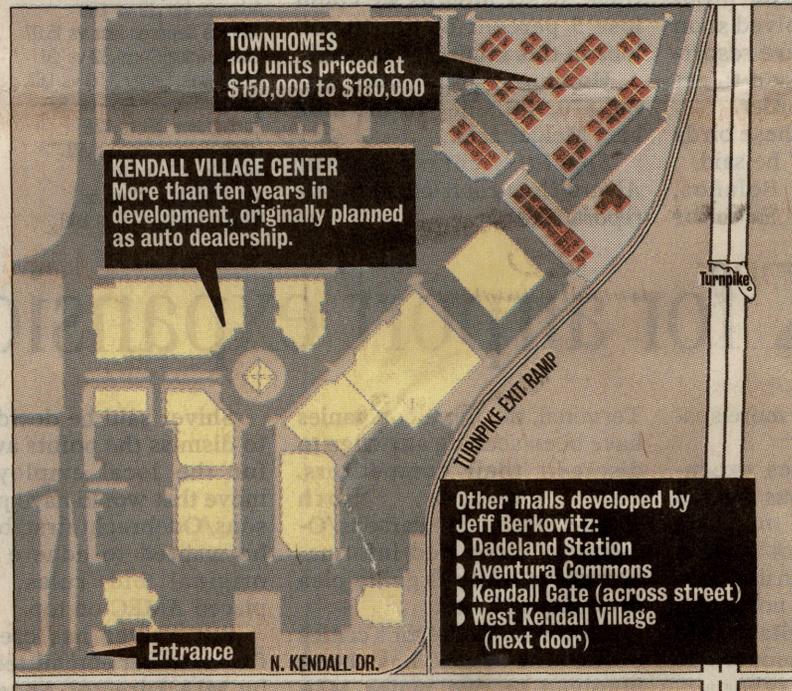
Since 1988, he had to change the project's concept at least three times, to overcome community opposition, bureaucratic hurdles, financing problems and difficulty securing tenants.

But perseverance has paid off for Berkowitz, who acts like a proud papa showing off his newest child, Kendall Village. The mixed-use development is rapidly filling up with tenants, including retail stores, restaurants, a health club, townhomes and a satellite campus for Nova Southeastern University.

The Gap, Gap Kids and Pier One have opened in the last week, the first residents have started moving into the townhomes, and Nova is preparing to start classes within the next month. Coming soon are Ann Taylor Loft, Latin American Cafe and Gatsby's, an upscale billiard club from Boca Raton.

## KENDALL VILLAGE CENTER

Developer Jeff Berkowitz and his partners, auto moguls Alan and Robert Potamkin, spent more than a decade trying to develop this 37-acre tract of land in Kendall near the Florida Turnpike.



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They'll join LA Fitness, Chuck E. Cheese, On the Border restaurant, Starlite Diner and Famous Footwear, which have all opened over the last year. By summer, most of the project will be completed, except for a gap where Regal Cinemas was supposed to build a 16-screen theater.

"I knew it would happen," Berkowitz said of the shopping center. "I just wasn't sure whether I would be around at the end."

Unlike the 10-dealer auto mall that Berkowitz and partners Alan and Robert Potamkin first planned

▶ PLEASE SEE KENDALL VILLAGE, 3C

# Developer's persistence pays off

## ► KENDALL VILLAGE, FROM 1C

for the site, the almost \$70 million project caters to the nearby community. Kendall Village is more than just a strip center — it's becoming something of a downtown for West Kendall.

Berkowitz designed Kendall Village as a cross between Mizner Park in Boca Raton and a traditional neighborhood shopping center. His vision for the project was to create a community gathering place based on a Mediterranean square, including a civic pavilion for use by local organizations.

West Kendall residents seem pleased to have a place in their neighborhood where they can go on a Saturday night, instead of making the trek east on Kendall Drive.

For the chance to stick close to home on a Saturday night, they're willing to tolerate waits as long as two hours for dinner at Bahama Breeze restaurant.

"Everyone that I know loves it," said Miles Moss, vice president of the Kendall Federation of Homeowner Associations, which fought the proposal for an auto park. "It's really become a part of the community. The people that eat in the restaurants and go shopping in the stores are West Kendall residents."

Retail brokers say the project demonstrates the strength of the West Kendall market, which has become a highly sought after location by many



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**VILLAGE STREET:** Developer Jeff Berkowitz designed Kendall Village as a cross between Mizner Park in Boca Raton and a traditional neighborhood shopping center.

retailers.

"The traffic is wild," said Susan Lima, general manager for Old Navy, which opened in March. "The area really needed this."

As the Kendall market has grown, the national chains have realized that they each need two stores, one west of the turnpike and another in the area near Dadeland Mall.

It's the same reason the Rouse Co. is moving ahead with plans to build Kendall Town Center, only a few miles away at Kendall Drive and

Southwest 162nd Avenue.

"These are two communities that are extremely affluent and exceedingly dense," said Jeremy Larkin, who heads the retail brokerage division for Larkin Schmidt Commercial. "You've got buying power and bunches of people. It can't get better than that."

Berkowitz estimates that in the five miles surrounding his project, there are 377,718 people with an average household income of \$71,012.

He's counting on those numbers to help him attract a

theater to replace Regal, which pulled out of the project because of financial problems.

Although attracting a new theater will be tough because of the movie theater industry's problems, Berkowitz is so convinced of the market that he's considering building the theater himself and leasing it to an operator.

"We've got the best location in the state of Florida," Berkowitz said. "The demographics speak for themselves. This is the gateway to the West Kendall community."