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5th Street and Alton Road: one of the many success stories behind Berkowitz Development Group

BY RAQUEL GARCIA

Jeff Berkowitz has some salient advice for aspiring young developers: "marry well." This Cornell graduate and University of Miami degreed attorney began his career in 1978 while working on a West Kendall commercial development campaign when the only area traffic was marauding cows and horses. He enjoyed the process and challenges involved in building burgeoning areas for future residents through rezoning and collaborative planning so much he became a developer himself. Today Berkowitz Development Group owns and manages over one million and a half square feet of office and retail space including the successful new vertical retail outlets and restaurants on 5th Street and Alton Road in South Beach.

"We took a blighted area, a local eyesore with no pedestrian traffic, in fact a formerly contaminated brownfield site and turned it into a destination spot for locals and tourists alike. Today 5th Street and Alton Road is a lively neighborhood with bikers and a tremendous amount of foot traffic enjoying the area. The addition of quality restaurants including The Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Company, Pizza Fusion, Subway, and Red Mango with outdoor seating on 5th Street including their bright red and blue umbrellas has energized the area." said Michael Berkowitz who is now a partner in his father's firm along with his brother Andrew.

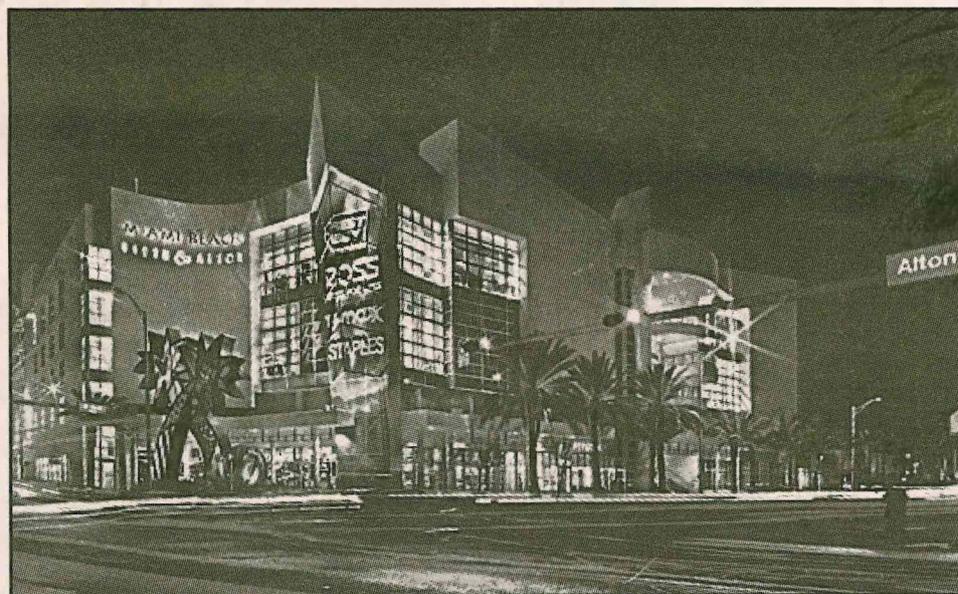
The vision began as a gateway to South Beach venue and evolved into what is today 180,000 square feet of vertical retail space, 1081 parking spaces on a 2.7 acre site that has already created over 500 jobs. Upon exiting the McArthur Causeway it is prominently visible with a modern design by Robin Bosco Architects and Planners that also incorporated the historic pharmacy building built in the 1920's.

The "Main and Main" 5th Street Alton Road project won Berkowitz Development Group the prestigious Urban Land Institute (ULI) Vision Award for 2010 Project of the Year. The ULI is a 33 year old not for profit organization identifying and promoting best practices in real estate development worldwide.

The activation of 5th Street and Alton Road where over 100,000 vehicles drive by daily according to Michael Berkowitz, took eight years to accomplish with many roadblocks slowly surmounted over time. Approval by the Department of Transportation zoning for outdoor seating, multiple design and redesign reviews by at least ten different architects, historic preservation clearance and art in public



Crowds gather for an early dinner on 5th Street and Alton Road



Painting the town red on 5th Street and Alton Road

places approval to name some of the challenges.

It is clear entrepreneur Jeff Berkowitz is truly a philosopher at heart upon hearing him reminisce about the challenges that preceded their many successes. "The natural inclination for people when hearing proposals for something different or unique and out of the ordinary is to say no. Bureaucrats especially tend to fear somehow they will get in trouble if they say yes. It is like working on a big jigsaw puzzle: politics, financing, construction, environmental issues and zoning are all of the

pieces and eventually they have to fit in together perfectly and on a timely basis for execution to be complete. It is certainly not an instant gratification business."

Mr. Berkowitz goes on to explain that over the many years as the business grew he experienced the various cycles that come and go like the seasons and says eventually one becomes so acquainted with the cycles that patience and endurance throughout the process are the best strategies to ride them out. "We like to treat no as foreplay," he concludes.

None of the successful Berkowitz

Development Group pioneered projects have come easy. The first big challenge that launched Jeff Berkowitz's was the Kendall Village Shopping Center took over sixteen years to finish with partners Alan and Robert Potamkin with whom the company still works closely. Dadeland Station vertical retail Center is another feather in their cap that did not happen without struggles yet today enjoys a bustling commercial business scene.

The anticipated Gables Station project between LeJeune Road and Ponce De Leon on South Dixie Highway with over 330,000 square feet is expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2014. Of the Gables Station endeavor Mr. Berkowitz says, "there have been lots of ups and downs, changes, setbacks, curveballs and hidden agendas but ultimately we are going to get it done because it is a great project. That is the only way to keep going after thirty years."

Main and Main on 5th Street and Alton Road now boasts a 98 percent leased space rate with classic consumer business draws like Publix, Best Buy, TJMaxx, Ross Dress for Less, Staples, PetCo and Vitamin Shoppe and four restaurants: Red Mango, Pizza Fusion, Subway and the Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Company. Total Bank will be joining them soon.

Red Mango is a top local franchise yogurt chain, Pizza Fusion is out of Fort Lauderdale and is organic vegan food friendly and also offers gluten free beer and wine. The Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Company was listed in the New Times Best of Miami Finest Foods for 2011 annual edition for their in-house filtering system that "Brooklynizes" the water creating "soft, malty and yeasty bagels inside with a crisp bronzed crust that comes from being preboiled." They also offer iced coffee with cubasta cubes or coffee ice cubes so that when the ice melts the coffee is not watered down.

Jeff Berkowitz says he lives life with the philosophy that it is never too late to have a happy childhood. Now that he gets to work with his two sons Michael and Andrew on a daily basis he enjoys being a mentor to them and growing together as a family business. He also loves the fact that when he takes off for his Maine summer home they stay in town and keep the jigsaw puzzle pieces coming together.

To find out more about the Berkowitz Development Group, the 5th Street and Alton Road project and others visit www.berkowitzdevelopment.com, email mberkowitz@berkowitzdev.com or call 305-854-2800.