

FACETIME  **BUSINESS OF
COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE**

This Sleeper seems to never grow tired

NEAL SLEEPER, PRESIDENT OF CITYPLACE CO., ON CREATING NEIGHBORHOODS



Good ideas and patient investors have helped Neal Sleeper wake up plenty of tired real estate.

JAKE DEAN

More than 23 years ago, Neal Sleeper didn't need much convincing to help some big-name North Texas investors turn what looked like 130 acres of urban blight into money-generating real estate.

The 68-year-old president of Cityplace Co. helped make over the Dallas neighborhood that bears the company's name and turned the West Village into a retail-and-residential destination. Most recently, the developer has been working on 3700M, the 381-unit, 21-story tower at 3700 McKinney Ave. that's scheduled to open later this year. In 2013, The Rustic restaurant and music venue was built on some of Cityplace's vintage Uptown acreage.

Now Sleeper says he's ready for his Dallas-based firm to develop the last few remaining parcels of that original tract.

"The thing that's really been working is the mixed-use character of the area, particularly on the Uptown side of the freeway," Sleeper said. "We have very dense residential, which is important to a walkable neighborhood."

In the past two decades, Sleeper has helped take the firm's \$45 million of property and increase the property's taxable value to nearly \$1 billion. Instead of building apartments and hoping residents would fill them,

NEAL SLEEPER

HOBBIES
Cycling 20 miles every Saturday

FAMILY
Spends time about with his 96-year-old mother and 32-year-old son in North Texas

Hometown
Dallas

Words of wisdom
"Our plan has always been to develop our best property last," Sleeper said prophetically in March 2013.

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Sleeper and his associates interviewed urban dwellers on their needs. They said they wanted retail near their homes. Sleeper got right on it.

"As odd as it may seem now, one of the most important decisions we made early on was getting that Target across the street," Sleeper said of the department store not far from his McKinney Avenue office. "Residents needed a place to buy basic stuff."

Sleeper's business has been anything but basic. Here's what he said the future might bring.

How did you get your job at Cityplace Co.? Back in the late 1980s after the real estate market had totally crashed, I had my own company called Sleeper & Associates. Ultimately, I'd been tracking the ownership of Cityplace and I knew it was getting ready to change. It was a high-profile property owned by Southland, which owned 7-Eleven and built the tower. They were going into a pre-packaged bankruptcy and their accountants advised them they needed to sell the property by the end of the year. That was in September of 1990 and at that time there was no market for land.

How did you know the current owners would buy the Cityplace holdings? I knew a few of the groups that would be interested in buying the property and I began calling on them. I called on this company called The Hampstead Group and spoke to a guy named Don McNamara and said, "Hey, I'd like to do some consulting work for you," and we had several meetings. At the end of those meetings, he said, "Well, we'll hire you to do some of the consulting work, but we're really looking at someone who can oversee development for us and run it. Would you like to do that?" I thought, "Wow, that's pretty interesting." It was overseeing about 130 acres of property a mile north of downtown Dallas. It was an area I had spent a lot of time working in. That was 23 years ago. It was a great opportunity.

What would like to do with those remaining parcels?

The Rustic is doing so well, I don't think we'll do anything with it anytime soon. We have enjoyed their success and they add an entertainment element to the area.

Do you have plans for new projects? We are working on a deal right now with a grocery store and another high-rise tower of apartments, which would be either the size of 3700M or a bit bigger. We would do a hotel and additional retail. We expect to be underway in about a year or so.

What's the key to creating a vibrant development like the West Village?

The secret has been the long-term commitment to create a walkable mixed-use area. That's what we set out to do 23 years ago. We created a plan that was creating a walkable mixed-use district with a significant retail component. We came up with design standards that we have adhered to throughout the entire time we've been developing, and it's really coming together now.

Can this be recreated in other parts of Dallas? It can be recreated. We have a great location, but you wouldn't have known it if you looked at this property 23 years ago. There's been quite a bit of change since we started this. Land deals just don't get done quickly. We had patient investors and stuck to a really good plan.

Candace Carlisle