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Developer is Westchester’s “Mall Kicker-Downer”
Cappelli’s projects have been key to region’s revitalization over last 30 years

Louis Cappelli has now dubbed himself “the Mall Kicker-Downer.” Cappelli, 73, has spent decades reimagining and rebuilding Westchester, especially New Rochelle and White Plains, as the founder of the Cappelli Organization and Chairman of its subsidiaries, LRC Construction and Cappelli Development Company.

After growing up in the Bronx and Yonkers and then graduating from Notre Dame with an engineering degree, Cappelli went to work for his father in electrical contracting but then moved into real estate development. He became a star in the region in the 1990s when he took over development and construction of New Roc City, which became a linchpin in revitalizing New Rochelle.

Then a decade later, he cemented his status as a powerhouse when he helped start White Plains’ rebirth with City Center. He also has been the force behind the Ritz in White Plains (where he now lives in a penthouse), as well as 25 North Lex and New Rochelle projects like 3Thirty3 and Encore.

But these days his two most substantive projects involve knocking down ugly and outdated old malls in White Plains, paving the way to breathe new life into the city. Along the way, Cappelli has continued adapting his vision to changing times.

“I’ve been around this area for a long time – too long to say on the record,” Cappelli jokes. “When I got involved in the ‘80s, everything was an office building. Office, office, office, office, office. There wasn’t one place to live downtown higher than three stories. The mayor then, Joe Delfino, said you could shoot a cannon down the street downtown at 5:01 at night, and nobody would hear it because there’d be nobody there.”

So Cappelli built residential towers, with condos selling particularly well. Now he has shifted heavily toward the rental market and adds that he’s starting to eye offices again. “The pendulum has swung too far, and there’s a market for a counterbalance. With everyone saying it’s time to stop working at home, we will swing back to adding offices.”

Hamilton Green, on the site of the White Plains Mall, opened this past winter with a 12-story apartment building and will be followed this summer by a 28-story tower on a brownfield site that the company cleaned up.

“We took a beaten down mall that was 50 years old and turned it into an unbelievable \$700 million development,” Cappelli says, noting that the project is filled with green initiatives like geothermal wells and electrochromic glass, which automatically tints windows to reduce the solar loads in summer but allows the solar heat to come in during winter. “The project’s complexity is certainly amplified because of the brownfield, which adds about six months to the job for

cleanup. But we’ve done 15 brownfield sites and understand how to do it.” Both are geared toward rentals, with 12 percent of the units fitting affordable housing markers and underground parking to avoid wasting public space. This project will include about 90,000 square feet of open space.

One tweak Cappelli is starting to make is creating larger apartments. “In the old days, you couldn’t build 500-square-foot studios fast enough, but now people want a 900-foot one bedroom,” he says, adding that he’s also seeing people look for more multi-bedroom options, so they don’t have to move out as the kids grow. So, the initially planned 156 units for the next 12-story tower are being reconfigured for 135 larger units.

There were supposed to be two more residential towers at Hamilton Green, but Cappelli has found a way to mix and match. Phase two will now include the 12-story rental, while the larger tower is being replaced by a new 300,000 sq. ft. world headquarters for the New York Power Authority. That building will not only feature the electrochromic glass but 146 geothermal wells dug 600 feet deep, EV chargers and solar panels on the roof. “It’s a really high-tech building,” Cappelli says. “It has everything other than a windmill.”

Cappelli is also deep into negotiations to redevelop the Authority’s old building on Main Street, which he says he’d knock down to build another modern office building. And, he says, he’s even thinking about applying his new outlook to his other big project, where he is planning on knocking down the old Galleria Mall.

“We’re hoping for approvals from the council soon, and then we can start knocking things down in the summer,” he says. “I love knocking things down.”

He notes that it is exceedingly rare for a \$2 billion project to be welcomed by the community with virtually no opposition, but that this mix of rentals – including affordable units, along with underground parking and public green space to further open up the city center – has largely been greeted with open arms, so he expects the approvals to happen.

At the Galleria, Cappelli originally planned to put up residential buildings with about 3,000 units of rentals, but now he says he may switch one or two of those to office buildings.

“I don’t want to worry about cannibalizing residential from one project to another,” he says. He looks at the office market in New York City picking back up and charging a fortune (\$250 per square foot in Midtown, he says) and thinks that some businesses will decide that instead of taking 1.5 million square feet at that price, they’ll take a 1.2 million and then grab 300,000 feet in White Plains, “which is just 32 minutes away and where I will charge \$80 per square foot,” he says. “So we can get that overflow.”



District Galleria, White Plains



25 North Lexington Ave, White Plains



AVE Hamilton Green, White Plains

Cappelli loves talking and thinking about buildings. He thinks many of the newer buildings going up in Manhattan have been gorgeous. “When you’re a builder, you have to be able to envision something new, but you have to appreciate these other ones too,” he says, adding that to him, a building is a work of art, like a sculpture.

To that end, he has gotten in the habit of going into galleries with his wife and buying up notable sculptures for his office. “I see these crazy things, like a gorilla made out of buttons by Eddy Maniez,” he says. “It’s about 6 feet high, and it’s just incredible.”

He also added a resin sculpture of a

man dressed in a guard uniform that says “Cappelli Security” on it and delights in seeing people’s reactions. “I can’t tell you how many people get out of the elevators to walk into my place and look at the security guard and ask, “Am I going the right way?”

Even he still finds the sculpture’s lifelike nature uncanny. “I was leaving the other night at nine o’clock by myself and I looked over and saw the security guard standing there and thought, ‘This guy’s going to move his lips or his arm,’” he recalls with a laugh. “It was a ‘Twilight Zone’ moment. I said to myself, ‘I think I’m just going to get in the elevator really quick.’”