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## Louis Sachs: The Man With A Plan

By SUSAN E. SAGARRA



Louis Sachs

**M**ore than 40 years ago, a young man saw potential for land that now is part of the city of Chesterfield. He purchased the land and planned precisely how it could be developed into its own village. Forty years later, that man said that the area has come to fruition almost exactly how he envisioned it.

The main reason it has turned out the way he wanted it is because he personally has nurtured his dream every step of the way.

Louis S. Sachs, chairman of Sachs Properties, wanted a village-like down-

town area in which all of the finest amenities – restaurants, entertainment, shopping, cultural arts, parks - would be located within a planned geographic area. For the most part, Sachs has made it happen, with the area that now is known as Downtown Chesterfield and Chesterfield Village sitting in the heart of the city of Chesterfield.

It was visionary back then, but it essentially was the birth of the area's first real Town Center, or master plan, before it became trendy.

“Of all the municipalities in St. Louis County, the city of Chesterfield was the only city that was planned before it was even built,” Sachs said.

Although he could be considered the person who has wielded the most influence and made the most impact in what now is known as Chesterfield, he is a soft-spoken gentleman, humble about all that he has

helped to accomplish. He shies away from attention, believing his purpose is to provide a better community in which his fellow citizens can live, work, shop, eat and play.

Today, at the age of 80, it seems that Sachs has not even thought about retirement. He continues to work toward ensuring that the entire plan is carried out as he planned it. In fact, he shows no signs of letting go of his dream until he personally sees that the entire mission is completed.

And the development of the area is not all about erecting buildings and creating office or retail space. While developing the properties, he has donated tenfold back to the community.

For his efforts, in 1999, Sachs was named Chesterfield's Citizen of the Year. In 2003, Sachs received the “Spirit of Chesterfield” award, which the Chesterfield Chamber of Commerce presents annually.

Sachs was born in 1928 to an immigrant family from Lithuania. His father, the late Samuel C. Sachs, graduated from Washington University and founded Sachs Electrical Contracting.

“My Dad grew up in a house without



Aerial view of Hwy. 40 and Olive Blvd.

electricity,” Sachs said. “So he became interested in electricity and went to Washington University to study electrical engineering. After he finished school, he got a job with Union Electric on the night shift. One night, he fell asleep and was fired. After that, he started Sachs Electric.”

Louis Sachs also graduated from Washington University and later worked for his father’s company.

“I never worked anywhere else; I started there when I was 14,” Sachs said. “I always felt like it was my Dad’s company and I just worked there.”

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**“When Louis first came out to Chesterfield, he thought it was very important to retain the history.”**

*KATHY HIGGINS*

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Thus, Louis Sachs yearned to start his own business and eventually, at the age of 35, established a real estate development business. He started with medical office buildings and later developed a shopping center and apartment complexes.

“Each time I bought land, somebody bought attractive land right next to it,” Sachs said. “That’s how I started in Chesterfield. I purchased 60 pieces of property and it eventually grew to 80 pieces. I had the entire area before development started.”

In 1967, he purchased 37 acres of land in West County that was zoned for apartments. Soon thereafter, he owned 80 parcels of property totaling more than 1,500 acres of rural farmland and woods.

In 1970, he hired Team Four to help develop the plans for the use of the land. A 3-dimensional model from the 1970 plan is on display in Sachs’ office; the model mimics the current reality.

He also had a chance meeting with Arthur “Cubby” Baer II, of Stix, Baer and Fuller department store, and Dick Jacobs of the Jacob Co., a developer of shopping malls. The duo was planning a major shopping mall in the area

and already had picked the northwest corner of Clarkson and Clayton Roads. However, Sachs had other plans. He convinced them to move their development a little further north, to the southwest corner of Clarkson Road and Hwy. 40, and Chesterfield Mall was born.

“If we had not assembled and planned it like we did, it would look like a bunch of odd parcels of property,” Sachs said.

Bounded essentially by Hwy. 40, Clarkson Road/Olive Blvd. and Chesterfield Parkway, the 1,500-acre Chesterfield Village development includes Chesterfield Mall as well as adjoining office and residential neighborhoods, retail shops, civic and recreational endeavors. Most of the commercial development is contained within the 3-mile loop of Chesterfield Parkway. Approximately 300 acres has been designated as Downtown Chesterfield, which will have three lakes, vast green space and walking/biking trails that tie it all together.

Ground was broken on Downtown Chesterfield in 2007, coinciding with the 40th anniversary of when he purchased the land.

Sachs also wanted easy access to the area and ensured that the road system around the development was carefully planned. He has worked with the state and county transportation departments on that road plan.

Sachs also has made sure that electrical lines are buried along parts of Baxter Road, Chesterfield Parkway and across Hwy. 40; he also paid for part of the Wild Horse Creek Road extension.

“Overhead power lines drive Louis crazy,” said Kathy Higgins, who has served as president of Sachs Properties since 1984. “He wants the city to bury all power lines.”

According to Sachs Properties, no eminent domain, tax abatement or tax increment financing was used and the businesses and residential properties generate more than \$5 million in annual tax revenue.

Ironically, although his real estate business began with the development of medical buildings, the main thing that Sachs said is lacking from his planned town is a medical facility.

### ***Preserving the area’s history***

Sachs also cares about the history and original inhabitants of the area.

When he started buying up land, he sent his PR person out to record the people’s history and stories, to gather family Bibles, farm tools and other artifacts. He hopes to some day display all of these symbols of the region’s history in a local history museum.

He also honored prominent family names by naming streets in the development after them: Justus Post Drive, Lydia Hill Drive, Burkhardt Place, Stemme Drive, Elbridge Payne Drive.

“When Louis first came out to Chesterfield, he thought it was very important to retain the history,” Higgins said. “He would meet with farmers to see if they would sell their land and asked if they had family heirlooms. He has an extensive collection. Some day he would like to combine with the city of Chesterfield’s Historic Commission to put everything on display.”

### ***Bringing culture to the community***

While the development has 1 million square feet of office and retail space; 2,600 residences; a 1.3-million-square-foot mall with retail, restaurants and a movie complex; 11 restaurants and three hotels, Sachs wanted more diversity.

Cultural attractions are a high priority for Sachs and he personally has helped create and fund numerous cultural assets.

Some of his contributions:

- Financially supported the St. Louis County Faust Park, where the Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House was built and named after his father’s second wife, and the Webster Music School resides.
- Donated land to the YMCA to build the organization’s only community theater and paid for the auditorium.
- Donated land to the Jewish Community Center, STAGES St. Louis, Junior Chamber International world headquarters, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Kol Am Temple and Ascension Catholic Church.
- Donated land to the St. Louis County Library and was the prime benefactor of the St. Louis County Library’s Samuel C. Sachs branch, named for his father.
- Funded the restoration of the old Antioch Baptist Church cemetery.
- Provided the site for the Kemp Auto Museum in Chesterfield Valley.

- Created Chesterfield Arts, a non-profit organization; his president, Higgins, served as past president of the organization.
- Has led the idea of adding numerous sculptures throughout the area, including donating at least 10 pieces personally to the effort. This fall, he plans to bring a replica of the well-known sculpture, “The Awakening,” to Chesterfield (see related story).

“Louis always has supported cultural arts, with the St. Louis Symphony, the St. Louis Art Museum and the like,” Higgins said. “He was concerned about the arts out west because they didn’t exist. He always supported the arts institutions. When he came up with the idea of Chesterfield Arts, we approached the city of Chesterfield and they thought it was a great idea. Louis thought it was important to have sculptures around the area – the first one was the Emilio Greco ‘The Bather’ at Hilltown Village.”

Sachs, however, is not done with the cultural aspects of his plan.

Sachs said he would like to have an art museum as one of the cultural attractions, perhaps as a satellite facility for the St. Louis Art Museum.

“I would like to have an art museum in Downtown Chesterfield,” Sachs said. “We could house Chesterfield Arts there. It will take a lot of money to build an art museum, though. The site across from the library would be a great spot.”

He also wants to build a facility to house the St. Louis County library’s genealogy collection, which is reported to be the most extensive collection of its kind.

Sachs also plans to donate 100 acres to city of Chesterfield to enlarge the city’s existing 35-acre park.

“I wanted everything right here in Chesterfield,” Sachs said. “I wanted a library, I wanted a community theater and I wanted churches and temples. I wanted parks for people to enjoy. I wanted the arts and I still want an art museum.”

And all of this is done for the betterment of the community.

“He does all of this unselfishly for the community,” Higgins said. “He has accomplished an amazing amount in 40 years.”

Finally, the true mark of Louis S. Sachs, the man, might just be found in

his employees’ loyalty.

Sachs President Kathy Higgins, for example, has been with the company for 32 years, serving as president since 1984.

“We have 25 employees and three-fourths of them have been here for at least 10 years and most have been here 15-20 years,” Higgins said. “When you come to work here, Louis says you can’t leave. And people don’t want to leave.”

## ‘The Awakening’ comes to Chesterfield this fall

Louis Sachs plans to bring a masterpiece sculpture, “The Awakening,” by American artist J. Seward Johnson, to Chesterfield this fall. Sachs is donating a second casting of this sculpture to Chesterfield Arts.

“It’s a sculpture I saw in Washington, D.C.,” Sachs said. “It was in a park and since has been moved. I don’t like where it is. Chesterfield’s sculpture will be located in the park addition that we will be providing to the city of Chesterfield. It’s magnificent; it’s like a giant man coming up out of the ground.

There will be roads and parking areas around it and it can be viewed from office buildings.”

“The Awakening” is a 100-foot, five-part cast aluminum sculpture that Johnson created for the 1980 International Sculpture Exhibition and Conference. It originally was installed at Hains Point (East Potomac Park) in Washington, D.C. Johnson sold the original statue for \$750,000 in 2007. The sculpture was excavated and removed from Hains Point in February 2008.

Placed in cooperation with the National Park Service, the giant now is embedded in the earth at National Harbor in Prince George’s County, Md., just outside of D.C.

The statue consists of five separate pieces buried in the ground, giving the impression of a panicked giant trying to pull himself to the surface. The left hand and right foot barely protrude, while the bent left leg and knee jut into the air. The 17-foot right arm and hand climb above the observer while the bearded face, with the mouth in mid-scream, struggles to emerge from the surrounding earth.



The original “The Awakening” now is embedded at National Harbor in Maryland.