

# Business

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(F10)

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staff photos by JERRY ZOLNISKY

Prudential Town Center earned praise largely because of the spacious indoor garden and large atrium in the original building.

## Architect says buildings should have 'character'

What makes a building architecturally sound?

Louis Redstone, a prominent Livonia architect, said a building should have a character of its own, add cultural character to an area and bring art to architecture.

Redstone — who has been an architect for 50 years — and his architectural design company are known for the Globe Building in Detroit, the Manufacturers National Bank building in Livonia, the Wayne H. Buell building on the Lawrence Technological University campus and the Grand Traverse Tower at the northern Michigan resort, among others.

"People will know it's Southfield and not South America," Redstone said when he talked about what an architect should keep in mind while designing a building. "Know that you're a member (of the community) — that's the most important part."

Art in architecture is paramount to Redstone. As president of the Business Consortium for the Arts in Southfield, he thinks that one way to tie the buildings together, create a theme and bring art into the community is through sculpture.

He would like to see a piece of sculpture in front of office buildings and might get an opportunity to

move his idea along at the Northland Theater. "We are making preliminary sketches now" and conducting an investigation to turn the theater into a performing arts center, Redstone said.

Don Gross, Southfield's strategic planner, confirmed that a feasibility study has been done and that it would cost \$3 million to \$5 million to convert the theater.

"We're going to pursue it," Gross said.

"I'm hoping to inject some kind of spirit and culture in Southfield," Redstone said. "The city is also trying to inject this kind of a spirit."

Imperial Plaza was called the "kind of a golden-paneled building that demonstrates the taste of Donald Trump more than anything else" by U of D dean.



## Suburban buildings criticized as vacuous

### Southfield singled out

By Philip A. Sherman  
staff writer

When future generations sift through business communities and try to piece together what our civilization was like, they will look to our architectural accomplishments for clues.

They will find buildings. Big, tall, stacked glass buildings. Low, flat, stacked glass buildings. Medium, tubular, stacked glass buildings. Angular, tilted, stacked glass buildings.

They will think the buildings, particularly some along the Northwest-Highway strip, are "vacuous and pedestrian," according to Bruno Leon, dean of the University of Detroit's school of architecture. "What it says is that every human being is identical, right?"

LEON is leading a charge against such architecture. Southfield isn't his only target.

He also mentioned, for example, the new Ritz Carlton hotel in Dearborn. "This post-modernism, supposedly an answer to the frigidity of modern movement, is in my opinion equally shallow because it borrows superficially or cosmetically."

"It's so stylistic and so non-derivative from the society itself that that thing's going to be tasteless when the petticoats go down again (when trends change again)."

But Leon's comments focused on Southfield — the city in search of a downtown that serves as the unofficial downtown for the tri-county area. It has a local, statewide, national and international reputation, thanks to companies such as EDS. The city's ability to attract business is near legend. Business builds buildings.

LEON THINKS architects and developers willingly ignore how those buildings address civic responsibility, mesh with the community, act on the environment and reflect our cultural heritage.

"Most of the time, these buildings are designed for one purpose and one purpose alone, and that is the maximization of profit," Leon said. He cited laws that allow developers to depreciate buildings over a seven-year period of time and then dump them, if they so choose.

"We run a sort of Kleenex society in America. We don't place significant values to things that become our footprints through history. You know — it's a piece of Kleenex. I'll use it momentarily, and then I'll throw it away," Leon said.

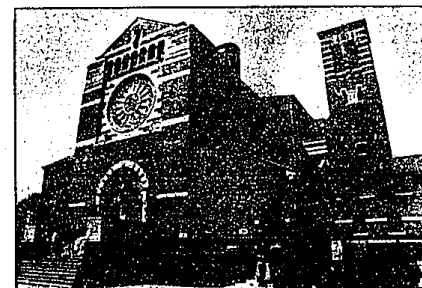
DON GROSS, Southfield's strategic development director, said he could agree with Leon on some points. Gross did not think Southfield, however, was a city without a history. Instead, he noted Southfield hadn't had much time to make tracks in the sand.

"Architecture is one of those things where beauty is in the eye of the beholder and from Southfield's standpoint, we don't have a lot of history to be reflected in our architectural heritage."

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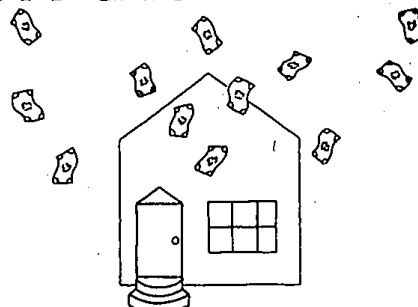


Don Gross  
Southfield's strategic development director



Dun Scotus stands in contrast to today's glass-paneled office buildings.

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## Boyhood friends open 2nd produce market in suburbs

### Their 1st store had to succeed

By Naomi Siegel  
special writer

What began as kid stuff has blossomed into a growing produce business for three entrepreneurs.

Tim Collins, 34, was a produce barker Saturdays at Eastern Market at age 10. Matt Martin was a stock boy at an east-side fruit market at age 13. And Vito Capizzi, 39, grew up as a third-generation melon thumper, setting up pyramids of grapefruit at age 11 at a Randazzo market and later, after Army service, at his brother's east-side store.

By age 16, Collins had been made a produce store manager and had Capizzi and Martin working with him. "We really got to know each other really well. We kept in touch for 10 years," Martin said. "But we never talked about opening our own produce business."

In 1982, Capizzi saw a store for lease in Oak Park, talked to the landlord and called Martin and Collins.

"Within hours, we were working on financing and store layout sketches. We knew we had the produce background we needed," Collins said.

Even with a produce sales background, ignorance was bliss when Oak Farms Produce, Fruit and Veg-

etable Market opened.

"None of us realized when we put together our stake of \$50,000, by mortgaging our homes that it would take all that and more just to set up our refrigeration system and storage in our back building, and buy our first week's supply of fruits and vegetables. Now we know that \$200,000 would have been more realistic," Collins said.

"It was very clear. We had to make it from day one."

Make it they did by offering low prices and a wide variety along with a selection of house plants and garden flowers, displayed outside when weather permits.

WHEN SOMEONE complained about the outdoor floral displays, Collins headed to court expecting a stiff fine because "I've heard of fines of thousands of dollars sometimes. I was scared. We couldn't afford that."

But the judge commented that Oak Farms' flowers gave the area a bright, cheerful appearance, like Eastern Market on Flower Day. The fine? \$5.

When a second Oak Farms location opened late last year at 31850 Grand River in Farmington, Collins, as flower buyer, saw to it the new store had hinged windows to display plants outside.

"We expect our Farmington customers to buy 14,000 flats this spring and summer, based on our sales at our Oak Park store last year."

Martin, a certified public account-

ant, works full-time as a financial consultant, but serves as the market's financial expert. On his travels he scouts other produce operations. He spends his two "free" days filling in at the store.

After a five-month stint in Australia, he took a three-month world tour that gave him the chance "to visit farms everywhere and learn more about foreign suppliers and the special conditions that affect import produce, such as shipping requirements and time factors," he said.

CAPIZZI CAN be found five or six mornings a week at Eastern Market and then at the Detroit Union Terminal. His bids and the quantities of produce and flowers he buys are based on the quality and "our promise to our customers . . . to maintain low prices across the board while holding to dependable quality and freshness."

"You can do all this if you buy right and move your merchandise quickly. You've got a maximum of five days on the average, less for some items like strawberries and grapes," Capizzi said.

Although the partners never run out of ideas, their suggestion box practically gives their customers seats at the Oak Farms' conference table. Items to add, appreciation and an occasional criticism are all a direct line to the bosses. When a wheelchair shopper asked for another opening in a certain aisle, "it was there the next time she came in," Capizzi said.