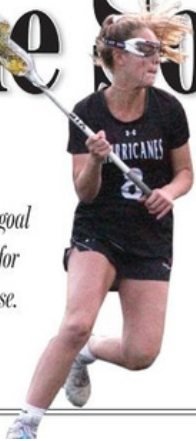


**THRILLER:**

Ava Derby's overtime goal picks up huge victory for Hurricane girls lacrosse. **A20**



**SHOWTIME!:**

East End Special Players are back with 'Turtles on the Tarmac,' a new original production. **B1**



Gregg and Mitchell Rechler at the Hampton Business District in Westhampton. Below, Amazon is one of the tenants

DANA SHAW PHOTOS

## A Family History of Development

Business park reaches full capacity

BY KITTY MERRILL

Mitchell and Gregg Rechler's company, Rechler Equity Partners, is the largest owner and operator of commercial real estate on Long Island, and has been for decades. That may be no surprise — creating space for businesses seems to be in the cousins' genes.

Celebrating the long-aborning denouement of the Hampton Business District — which is about to reach 100 percent occupancy — with a tour of the Westhampton site recently, the descendants of "the first family of commercial real estate"

detailed some of their family's fascinating history in development on Long Island.

Their grandfather William, along with his brother Morton and brother-in-law Jack Wexler, collected aluminum for the war effort and, after World War II ended, found themselves with a surplus of the previously scant metal in the family store on the Grand Concourse in the South Bronx. The men were friends with lots of avant-garde artists and, taking note of their buddies struggling to carry heavy easels around,

See **RECHLERS**, Page A7



## RECHLERS: Buildings Steeped in Family Legacy

FROM PAGE A1

thought to invent and manufacture lightweight portable aluminum tripods.

"They go to sell it, and it's a completely failed business plan," Gregg explained. The artists were too poor to buy new equipment.

Then, one summer day about six months later, William and the cousins, along with their grandmother, went to Coney Island. They paid 50 cents for two wooden chaise lounges.

Seeing him lugging heavy wooden chairs onto the sand, Gregg related, "My grandmother said, 'Hey, schmuck, you're so smart, why don't you take the rest of the metal and make a beach chair?'"

"And the light bulb went off. They invented the iconic beach chair, the one we all grew up with."

The business took off — they ended up building six factories in the Bronx. "They were the sole patent holders and manufacturers of the aluminum beach chairs. They sold the business around 1957," Mitchell said.

In 1960, aware that there was a strong migration of manufacturers to Long Island, William partnered with developer Walter Gross to buy 1,400 acres in Hauppauge. It became one of the largest industrial parks in the country, second only to Silicon Valley in California.

By the late 1960s, William's sons, Roger and Donald, decided to leave the retail business. They also set sights on industrial park development. Forming Rechler Associates, they purchased land across from Long Island MacArthur Airport in Islip and built Long Island's first high-tech industrial park. By 1978, with the redevelopment of an industrial space in Syosset, they crafted the first office building replete with amenities such as a health club and meeting rooms in a multi-tenant building. An early tenant was the company that developed bar code scanning.

Gregg and Mitchell joined Reckson during the early 1980s. They wanted to blaze their own trail, but also to honor their ancestors, especially when they had great ideas.

One of the buildings in the Hampton Business District replicates a horseshoe-shaped design that Roger and Donald conceived. It features a large interior circulation area that easily accommodates delivery

trucks pulling up to individual warehouses.

"This is the exact footprint of the prototype that our dads built in the 1970s," Gregg said during a tour of the site. "It's nice to utilize our legacy designs."

"We learned almost everything from them," Mitchell added.

The pair pay homage to their fathers in their developments. Roger's Way in the Hampton Business District is named for Roger Rechler, while another road in a proposed upland park will bear Donald's name.

The discussion of family history took place in the spacious Rechler Equities office located in the corner of a building at 220 Roger's Way in the development. Decorated in a modern style that evokes luxury and attention to detail, the office also reveals the cousins' love of art. They commissioned the giant metal "Walking Figure" sculpture by New York artist Donald Baechler for the roundabout. It raised some eyebrows when it was installed in 2014.

But Raffi Arslanian loves it. The owner of Thompson Ferrier, which makes what he described as the most high-end candles in the United States, said the statue was one of many aspects of that district that fueled his desire to be a tenant.

"He's been a tenant in the development for just over a year, and said he was also drawn there by its excellent management. It's his pristine and 'run like a fortress,'" he said. The expensive candles — so far, their run as high as \$15,000 — are, he said, "by far the most unique." They're poured, packaged and shipped from the Westhampton locale. The ambiance in the district is important to the luxury candle maker. "We keep the place impeccably clean, and that's exactly what I like on the outside," he said.

Security is a big plus for the tenant. Taking the tour outside to the rear of the establishment, he displayed a mountain of boxes ready for delivery. "There's so many cameras here, nobody's touching it," Arslanian said.

"So much goes on," from just a 2,500-square-foot space at 215 Roger's Way, Gregg noted. Buildings were constructed so they could be carved up into sizes that suited prospective renters.

"What's cool," Gregg said, "was we were able to create a building with much smaller spaces than the big ware-



Mitchell and Gregg Rechler with Raffi Arslanian of Thompson Ferrier, one of the tenants at the Hampton Business District.

DANA SHAW

es. They range from a little bit over 2,000 square feet. We have a lot of smaller tenants in that building."

Across the complex at 200 Roger's Way, another tenant, Duggal Visual Solutions, occupies one of the largest spaces in the district. Based in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the printing, graphic/digital display and multimedia company is housed in a gigantic 25,000-square-foot space and about to expand into another 50,000 square feet.

Duggal has the biggest printers in the industry. One behemoth as big as a train car features a catwalk inside and a com desk rivaling the Starship Enterprise. It can create 500 prints in 83 minutes, plant manager George Wright said.

Huge buckets of printer ink rest on shelves in the climate-controlled room. A massive print of Led Zeppelin from a photo taken by facilities manager Mike Leach at a concert in 1977 catches the eye in a second room, as two women work on a 20-foot-long piece laid on the floor, arranging prints of wallpaper.

A break area at first appears lined in pickled wood planks. Touching it, one learns it's wallpaper designed to replicate the look of the wood. In the entrance lobby, more of the company's massive prints dominate — a curling wave appears ready to crash onto a desk, and a replicated photo of a woman printed with lenticular lenses has an eye that winks.

Although the Rechlers don't impose an interior design standard on tenants, Duggal's office evokes the same clean, modern lines. Mitchell explained that prospective tenants

who visit their offices in Westhampton and Plainville are inspired to eschew "vanilla" designs.

Additionally, Gregg informed, "Every time a tenant comes through our door, we sit down with our house architect and lay into whichever space they're looking at; it's always a turnkey proposal. We take all the timing risk — the building risk, permit risk, construction risk. Until the space is built out and ready to be occupied, they're not paying rent."

Duggal's planned expansion into an additional 50,000 square feet in 230 Roger's Way will bring the district to 100 percent occupancy.

"It's incredibly fitting that we have reached full occupancy at the Hampton Business District thanks to an existing tenant's success, which has led to their need for more space," said Mitchell. "We are focused on giving our tenants opportunities to grow within our portfolio of industrial space and remaining flexible to suit their needs. Duggal is a shining example of what Rechler Equity Partners offers to its tenants."

The milestone puts the icing on a cake that's taken the cousin some 16 years to bake. They responded to a request for proposals looking for development plans issued by the land's owner, Suffolk County, in 2007. Not many other developers responded to the request. There weren't a lot of developers looking to create a business park so far east.

The Rechlers had a different point of view. "My grandfather and our dads — in both of their cases — they didn't just go find the

biggest piece of land and get it rezoned. They really were in tune with what was happening in the economic climate at the time. Both our grandfather and fathers' case saw there was a strong market need to be filled. For Mitchell and I, we felt the same way about the East End," Gregg said. "Our perspective was it needed to serve the East End. We weren't trying to pull people out, we were trying to serve an existing market that wasn't getting served."

Authorized by county officials, the RFP looked to create a hub for such industries as movie studios or tech companies. "You can't build a park that way — it's all driven by market," Gregg explained. One film production company was an early tenant and, he recalled, "they ended up going belly-up ... you can't just put yourself into a box."

The cousins won the RFP and Gregg recalled the day they signed the lease in 2009. "We sat at a rickety table on the corner with County Executive Steve Levy."

"We tend not to do things easy," Gregg offered with a grin. Crafting a zoning plan — a planned development district — with Southhampton Town officials who had land use authority, took three years, many of them during a major economic crisis.

Still, said Gregg, "We recognized there was not a contemporary quality warehouse or industrial product and that if we built something that embraced modern technology, had the flexibility and basically a formula, the same for our grandfather and fathers had — design building can do different sizes, high

enough ceiling height, sufficient parking, good loading, that we would be successful. The secret ingredient is to create constant flexibility. These buildings will survive generations. We own buildings our grandfather built in the 1960s. Those buildings are still some of the most competitive buildings on Long Island because they were built with flexibility."

"We're really proud," Mitchell enjoined.

The first building, 220 Roger's Way, was developed almost eight years ago. From there, the Rechlers constructed 200, 215, and 245 Roger's Way. Number 245 is home to a massive Amazon hub. The last building, 230 Roger's Way, is nearly completed and already fully leased.

In all, the district hosts five buildings and some 22 separate businesses in 385,000 square feet of space on 50 acres adjacent to Francis S. Gabreski Airport.

The Rechlers are used to seeing a sense of community develop in their multifamily residential projects, but they never saw it in a commercial park before. Until now, at the Hampton Business District.

"It's amazing," Arslanian said. "When I need a forklift, I ask Mike and he sends one over."

The pair marveled at the community that's been born. They've seen tenants in their residential developments begin to interact and connect, but in a business district? "It's very unusual," Mitchell said.

"We have parks all over Long Island and never have this sense of community," Gregg affirmed. "It's special."