

BUILDING

LONG ISLAND

The people, projects and policies shaping Long Island real estate

Ted Weiss and
Craig Weiss

T. Weiss Realty

Fresh Vision,
Solid Success

A Winning Formula

*T. Weiss Realty
Transforms Old Buildings
Into Class A-Office Space.*

By Adina Genn

Ted Weiss, founder of T. Weiss Realty Corp., looks at building a business like, well, developing a commercial property. Start with a good foundation and invest in state-of-the-art material. For good measure, toss in some risk. Mix in a healthy dose of teamwork. And all the while stay ever mindful of quality and value. Along the way, build relationships with clients and vendors—friends who will join in making your community a better place.

It is this formula, largely, that Weiss has leaned on. It served as his modus operandi at the very beginning of his commercial real estate career back in 1974, when he purchased and renovated his first building in Massapequa. And it still serves him well today, when his portfolio is synonymous with high-end properties.

Yet, for years Weiss was reticent to admit his company's success. Never mind that his various Class-A office buildings have been, for the most part, fully occupied. Or that the buildings themselves are clustered around Melville's prestigious Route 110 corridor.

'New Kid on the Block'

His reluctance may come as somewhat of a surprise to anyone who in the last 10 years has become familiar with the T. Weiss brand, especially since the firm just announced that its first national tenant—institutional retail brokerage Janney Montgomery

Company founder and Chief Executive Officer Ted Weiss; Craig A. Weiss, director of leasing and acquisitions research; and Marci Skeahan, chief operating officer.

PHOTO BY JAY BRENNER



Scott—is taking 12,000 square feet at Melville Corporate Center III, Weiss’ recently opened state-of-the-art four-story building. And it is also surprising considering that Weiss has a host of expansion plans, which include the opening of two more Class-A buildings in Huntington, and is developing two subsidiary businesses. Further yet, he plans to foray off Long Island, given the right circumstances.

But Weiss—whose professional circle uses words like “visionary” to describe him—explains why his hesitancy persisted despite winning the kinds of honors and awards that the region’s top entrepreneurs collect.

“We were the new kid on the block. We were always trying to prove ourselves,” says Weiss. “So for the first 25 years, I was never comfortable.”

“Long Island has been a closed club,” explains Robert Gladitsch, a banker with M. Robert Goldman Company. Gladitsch, whose firm has financed many buildings on the 110 corridor since 1932, brings an unusually broad perspective to the industry. The well-known commercial developers in the region are primarily second and third generation family-run enterprises, he points out. While institutional investors or other firms might come in and buy a portfolio, few have actually developed Class-A buildings. “Ted may be the only guy who came in and did it in the high-profile market in Melville. It speaks volumes about his ability,” says Gladitsch.

From Eyesore to Class A

In the 1990s, while established players saw dilapidated buildings that were priced too high, Weiss recognized a dynamic and embarked on his own game plan. Realizing that the market was steadily improving, he hit upon a long-term growth cycle, says Gladitsch. And the market bore out Weiss’ vision.

“Ted has found a very good niche for himself in converting older industrial buildings into quality tenant space,” agrees Douglas A. Omstrom, senior director at Corporate National Realty, a commercial and industrial broker located in Woodbury. Among the buildings Weiss has transformed: 532 Broadhollow Road. in Melville, back in 1996, and a year later, 2150 Joshua’s Path in Hauppauge. A sterling new



Foot path through koi ponds at Melville Corporate Center III, 324 South Service Road.

example, Omstrom notes, is the Melville Corporate Center III on South Service Road, a building for which he served as broker. A visitor would never suspect that the site was an industrial one in its earlier incarnation, and that original elements are still incorporated.

Craig Weiss, Ted’s son who joined the business in August, explains: “The one-story part of the building in the rear, where the T. Weiss offices are located, uses the infrastructure from the original industrial building. The entire front ‘tower’ and lobby were completed with all brand new materials. For all of our conversions, there’s usually a portion of the original building’s infrastructure—as long as it’s in solid condition—that we will keep intact.”

“It’s a quality building, and at a great location that will definitely attract Fortune 100 companies,” says Omstrom, who sold Weiss his first Melville building. “Ted is really good at taking undervalued warehouse buildings that others saw as eyesores and turning them into office space. He saw opportunities in the marketplace that others could not see.”

In Weiss’ case, perhaps being a newcomer to the commercial real estate scene was actually a strength, prompting him to take a second and even a third look at the kind of properties that others either fail to value or simply dis-

Melville Corporate Center I, 105 Maxess Road



‘In an industry fraught with gray areas, Ted always worked hard to portray his business in black and white. If he says he’ll do something, he does it. You can shake his hand, and he’ll remember what he said.’

—Ray Ruiz, CB Richard Ellis

miss. “Ted wasn’t as gun shy as most of the bigger players at the time,” Gladitsch points out. “He had confidence in himself as well as in the market.”

It can be a challenge, real estate experts say, to attract Fortune 100 companies to even consider leasing a converted warehouse building. “They want a flagship building,” Gladitsch notes. “But Ted’s buildings have attracted Class-A tenants. Through his vision, and the way he saw the bricks and mortar, he saw something there. And he was right.”

Each Square Foot=Productivity

Weiss reflected back on T. Weiss’s early days, from behind the desk of his spacious, windowed office inside Melville Corporate Center III. The building is complete with every imaginable amenity, from its uninterruptible power supply generator to its full-WiFi capabilities, from its meditation gardens to its atrium complete with waterfall and trees where visitors can either unwind or conduct their business in a relaxed setting. That’s not to mention its nearly

completed full-service gym, restaurants, coffee bar, and on-premise conference center.

Weiss takes care to keep pace with the ever-growing demand for technology. “Ted has developed a kind of unique product in terms of technology and what people want in a modern-day building beyond the usual amenities,” notes Ted Stratigos of Cushman & Wakefield. WiFi is in place. The heating and air-conditioning systems have built-in redundancies so there is backup if a system goes down. Weiss also “made this building as secure as you’ll find,” Stratigos says, complete with safety measures that include photo-ID security and reports that show who is coming and who is going 24 hours a day. These elements, says Ted Weiss, will be in all of his buildings from now on.

The building is designed to accomplish Weiss’ goal to make every corner of the premises conducive to productivity. That means tenants and visitors to the building can run their business while grabbing a quick workout on the treadmill, enjoying a fast snack, or just taking in the

attractive surroundings. In a larger sense, the building fits in perfectly with Weiss' overall mission—Help your clients profit and everyone wins.

In the world of commercial real estate, this means clients can grow their companies, and, as a result, take on additional office space. Weiss in turn can grow his own business through quality clients with whom he has already developed a strong working relationship.

And, in fact, the building's design is in keeping with Weiss' own work ethic. "I love what I do," he concedes. "I don't remember not wanting to come to work. When it's 5:00 p.m. and I see people leaving, I'm surprised because I think it's only noon." For Weiss, life and work are a mix of tremendous overlap, and when you love the setting in which you work, you can accomplish a lot more.

Scaling Back at Full Speed

Ted Weiss, who reconfigures his business plan about every five years, plans to double the company by 2013. In the next 18 months he expects to add four to eight people, expanding T. Weiss organically and through acquisition. At the same time, he plans to scale back his workweek, cutting his typical four to five days at the office back to three to four days. He can do that now that his son Craig is on board.

Craig Weiss joined the firm after spending three years on Wall Street, two years at Morgan Stanley and one at hedge fund Scout Capital Management. And while he's still learning some of the particulars of the family business, he has virtually grown up in the industry, so he was able to hit the ground running. "I have a solid foundation through osmosis," Craig Weiss notes, pointing out that he learned a lot by simply listening during dinner table discussions. "The older I got, the more interested I became."

Ted Weiss makes it clear that he welcomes Craig by his side and enjoys teaching him the ropes. He also seeks his opinion. "After 30 years, the brain cells are drying up," Ted jokes. "Craig offers a fresh approach, a new perspective." Most of the time, their outlooks are directly in line, father and son report. And where they disagree, Craig says he respects the scar tissue his dad has picked up in the 30



532 Broadhollow Road (above) and the atrium at Melville Corporate Center III (right).

years he's devoted to the industry.

For example, Craig, who has worked and still lives in Manhattan, sees business opportunities in New York City that Ted might not otherwise consider. This intrigues Ted. Still, he says, "we have to crawl before we run," adding that he wouldn't be quick to embark on a 150,000-square foot building in the city. "We'll start small," he says, perhaps beginning with a property in one of the outer boroughs.

This is the kind of teamwork that drives Ted, who, before he got into real estate, worked as a junior high school physical education teacher. He welcomes new ideas and input from staff, he says, and makes a point of giving his workforce recognition, in the same way he used to take the time to praise his students when they made a good catch on the baseball field. "You've got to let people know they're needed," he says.

Marci Skeahan, the company's chief operating officer, testifies to Ted's strength as a team leader. She joined T. Weiss 16 years ago, bringing the total staff level at that time to three people, including Ted himself. The job market was tough then, and, in accepting a receptionist-secretary position, Marci was working below her level of administrative experience. She planned to stay a year or so, then move on.

"Ted handed me an opportunity to grow with the company and take on responsibility that I don't believe many people get," says Skeahan. "He brought me into the fold and taught me everything. He makes everybody important. I'd never have learned what I know about the industry without a mentor like Ted. He gives you the ability to succeed."

Marci was steadily promoted as her role grew and, as



'Ted is very meticulous about his work. His buildings are kept up beautifully.'

Joseph M. Willen, president and CEO, Advantage Group

chief operating officer, has an unparalleled perspective of the business. "Her top down knowledge of the firm's operation allows her to influence every facet of our business," Craig Weiss observes, "and has bolstered [my father's] ability to take this firm to new levels."

Teamwork is visible at the office, where staffers put aside projects for a moment to handle inquiries from prospective tenants, while Ted and Craig take time out to show a visitor around the new headquarters and confer with contractors.

Today it seems safe to say that any discomfort that Ted Weiss has felt with success has all but dissipated. Maybe it's his 30-plus years in the business. Or maybe it's that his company's portfolio currently includes seven properties, in Melville, Hauppauge, Huntington, and Massapequa. Or maybe it's because having Craig around is helping him re-engineer the company to navigate the ever-changing business landscape.

Ted Weiss has weathered withering economic down-

turns, navigated government regulations and fluctuating interest rates, and prevailed among developers who gained their foothold in commercial real estate generations before he entered the field. He is happy to be at a point where he can pick and choose his projects, his tenants, and people to collaborate with in building a better Long Island.

So today's Ted Weiss seems very comfortable, indeed. "I finally realized, 'What's the worst that could happen?'" he says. The company had a solid foundation, as well as strong relationships with real estate brokers and bankers—and it was not over-leveraged. "We treat people with integrity and ethics," he adds, "and it comes back to us."

Strength in a Potentially Sagging Economy

Even at a time of faltering real estate property values, when economists and business leaders talk of recession, Weiss still resonates confidence. After all, Long Island office space remains enticing to national companies who want a New York presence, but not necessarily the high rents that Manhattan Class-A space generates. For Weiss, the Janney Montgomery Scott lease is proof positive. And, though he won't disclose their names just yet, other national firms are expressing interest, Weiss says.

Like any savvy entrepreneur, Weiss is diversifying his portfolio as a way to serve new markets. His TOTUS Office Suites, for example, addresses the needs of the contemporary business owner who works from a home office but requires temporary office space. The suites come fully furnished and can be rented month-to-month. True to his mission to help his clients grow their businesses, TOTUS



2150 Joshua's Path, Hauppauge: The dramatic atrium, the impressive building exterior, and the fitness center.





Weiss' only medical and office building, 200 Boundary Ave., Massapequa.

provides professional support staff, conference and meeting rooms, concierge services, and even a notary public, to help boost productivity and prosper.

"If our tenants succeed, Melville succeeds—and Long Island succeeds," says Ted Weiss.

In addition, Weiss is beefing up another subsidiary, Conference & Meeting Centers of Long Island (CMCLI), with new headquarters at the Melville Corporate Center III. This facility offers yet another full-service amenity to his corporate tenants, enabling them to hold training and seminars on site, and eliminating the need to travel along Long Island's already congested roads to hold a conference at an area hotel. Breakout rooms, a business center, and catering services are all available—factors that will probably make it difficult for tenants to find a reason to leave the premises during the day. Weiss is now staffing up this subsidiary to promote CMCLI to other area businesses.

Buildings With a Dose of Integrity

Ted Weiss considers the T.W. brand as a holistic package. "We don't just lease space. We're providing what it takes to help businesses prosper," he points out. "If we don't help them meet their needs, we have only temporarily secured their business."

Ray Ruiz, a commercial real estate broker with CB Richard Ellis, says that kind of commitment has helped Weiss build a following. "In an industry fraught with gray areas, Ted always worked hard to portray his business in black and white. If he says he'll do something, he does it. You can shake his hand, and he'll remember what he said." Those sentiments are echoed elsewhere.

Melville Corporate Center II, 330 South Service Road



"Ted immediately hit the scene as a good landlord who is in tune with the tenant and is good with office space," notes Cushman & Wakefield's Stratigos. "Ted is a very hands on landlord." Unlike other developers, "there are not a lot of layers at his firm. You deal with Ted and his close right-hand people," says Stratigos.

'Ted has developed a kind of unique product in terms of technology and what people want in a modern-day building beyond the usual amenities.'

—Ted Stratigos,
Cushman & Wakefield

"Ted is very meticulous about his work," says Joe Willen, president of Advantage Title in Huntington. The evidence can be found in his buildings, which Willen points out, "are kept up beautifully."

Ted Weiss is also known for giving back to the community. Both he and Craig are active in The Nature Conservancy.

He also supports the Family Service League's Work-Plus, by donating funds that provide corporate attire to people who gain job skills through the program and seek and obtain employment. With Willen, he will soon be honored at a benefit for The Gurwin Center.

Ted at last can talk about what he's accomplished with well-justified satisfaction, and when he envisions the future, there is a certain gleam in his eyes. "I could never retire," he says. "I'm having too much fun." ♦

