



# Rise Above The Ordinary

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## MERLIN DEVELOPMENT C O M P A N Y

**Success Magazine: Bruce, what does success mean to you?**

Bruce Levinsky: Success is the completion of the project you're working on, the satisfaction of a job well done, and the recognition of your contribution.

**SM: Describe something you've attempted that did not bring economic reward.**

BL: When I first came to Saratoga, I was astonished that there was no public art in the downtown area. I felt that if I contributed an example of public art, perhaps my contemporaries in the development field would emulate my actions. I bought two expensive bronze horse sculptures and placed them in front of two buildings that I had renovated. The response over twenty years was negligible. The recent public sculpture of seasonal plastic horses is not my idea of permanent public art. They are entertaining, but not substantive.

“ I am a determined and persevering visionary. I know what it takes to work with people and see the job through. ”

**SM: How did you get into this business? What was your background?**

BL: I graduated from college as a History/English major, and then went on to study business in graduate school. I ultimately found that I had a facility to coordinate large projects, which came from working for an international construction company and a large international bank in Manhattan. I eventually left the city to work with my father as a developer of medical facilities. From there, I branched out into general contracting and real estate development.

**SM: So, you were able to learn from your father and evolve to the next level?**

BL: Some of my training came from my academic studies, but the aspect of buying land, obtaining financing, architectural engineering, and the execution of construction I learned from working with my father. That on-the-job training was very insightful and beneficial.

**SM: What brought you to this region?**

BL: I had returned from Aspen Colorado and I was living in Vermont when I visited Saratoga. I was impressed with the architectural detail and opportunity to develop residential rehabs. I initiated the first condominium by renovating an old Victorian home into residential space on Union Avenue.

**SM: How did you move from residential to commercial?**

BL: The evolution of residential to commercial was a movement from the east side to downtown. I felt that downtown was a hardhat district by default, and I thought if I created an interesting and creative exterior and interior space, people would pay a higher rate for something that was unique. Saratoga, in the early 80's, was in need of a great deal of polishing. It had a great inventory of buildings, but the buildings were very deteriorated and neglected. I have always preferred to work on the renovation of older buildings instead of new construction.

**SM: How did you play into the renovation of Saratoga Springs?**

BL: The first wave of renovating a downtown is rehabilitating some of the older buildings like the Granite Palace and the Rip Van Dam—creating a catalyst. As a downtown starts to morph into a more gentrified environment it becomes more attractive to people looking to live and shop there, like our 20 Elm Street project in Glens Falls. This sparks the need for larger projects and even new construction. This has happened in downtown Saratoga and it is what I expect will happen in Glens Falls

**SM: Why have you chosen Glens Falls?**

BL: Glens Falls is very similar to Saratoga in composition and size, but it is 20 years behind Saratoga in attracting developers. It

had initially less to offer developers because other areas were more attractive economically and chronologically—namely Sarato-

and a new 60,000sf public library to name a few attractions.

**SM: Was the price point for land and buildings much lower than Saratoga?**

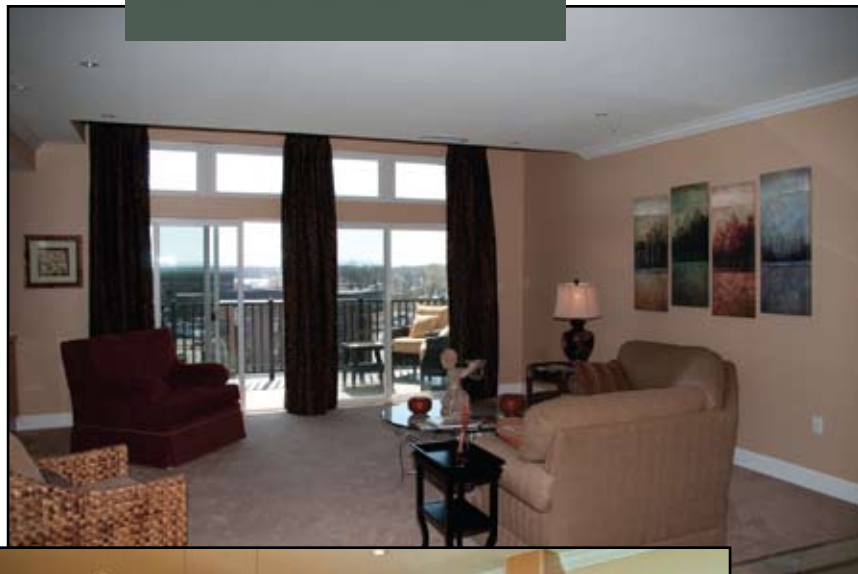
BL: At the time that we focused on Glens Falls, the differential was at least 60 to 75% less in Glens Falls than it was in Saratoga. That equation has changed—the differential now is more like 40 to 50%.

**SM: You have enhanced the property values of the town, attracting greater business and income to the city and surrounding areas. Your term for this is “new urbanism.” What is your personal vision for the future for Glens Falls?**

BL: I believe that Glens Falls will evolve into a most favored community, not unlike the original “Hometown USA.” I expect it will not fall prey to some of the complications that Saratoga has been dealing with (i.e. inadequate parking and varied schizophrenic architecture). My vision for Glens Falls is that we will be able to optimize its location, since it is equidistant between Saratoga and Lake George. Glens Falls has more value for the money than any other community in the area. And, as time moves on, it will have an equally attractive social and cultural environment.

**SM: With this new urbanism, you are integrating the old with the new, the residential with commercial space. What is new urbanism to you, and how and why will it work in downtown Glens Falls?**

BL: New urbanism is having a downtown that is more culturally interesting, architecturally attractive, and socially engaging. The concept is more pedestrian than vehicular—a place where people can walk to



ga and Lake George. The low hanging fruit was picked by developers in Queensbury and Wilton, and then Glens Falls became appealing. Now Glens Falls has a new downtown infrastructure, a new four lane bridge to South Glens Falls, a pro-development administration, a user friendly chamber of commerce, the Charles R. Wood Theater,

# Start Each Morning



accommodate their shopping, socializing, and entertainment needs. If you can find a way to incorporate all of these amenities in a downtown project, like 20 Elm, you will have a successful city.

**SM: What have you done with the Clark Brother's glove factory?**

BL: We took the 80,000 square foot, three-story building and doubled the size by adding 3 1/2 stories, as well as a 250 car parking garage. We have created a mixed use project of 52 residential units 23,000 feet of commercial space, and 16,000 feet of retail space. We are located two blocks from the main thoroughfare of Glens Falls. We are across the street from the new Glens Falls Hospital. By adding 3 1/2 floors, we have capitalized on the majestic view that Glens Falls provides. You can see the beauty of the Hudson, West Mountain skiing, all the way north to Lake George, east to the Green Mountains of Vermont, and south toward Albany.

**SM: What is your target market for your new project The Mill?**

BL: I wanted to incorporate as many amenities as possible that would reflect both the practicality of the inside and the beauty of the outside. On each floor there is an atrium that can be used by owners of 20 Elm—for a cocktail party, business party, or just a place to rest and reflect with your neighbors. All of

the people in the residential and retail units have dedicated parking in the new 250 car garage and use of a 2500 square foot rooftop terrace. The clientele is broad-based, not restricted by age. It is designed appropriately for an audience ranging from the young professional to the empty-nesters.

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**SM: What other properties do you own in Glens Falls?**

BL: The 92 unit Heritage Apartment Complex, the ten-story CNA building (where we are building a 300 car parking garage), as well as the 60,000 square foot building at 221 Glen Street.

**SM: It is our understanding that you're looking to develop a new 120 room hotel in town. What is the status of that project?**

BL: We have other projects taking priority at the present time, but I do believe that one or two new hotels will be coming to our area in the very near future. This is due to the new hockey team coming to our Civic Center, a can-do attitude by City Hall, and an obvious need for this amenity for tourists. Another visionary developer, Peter Hoffman, is presently working on bringing a new hotel to Glens Falls.

**SM: How does the recession affect your market plan? Are you looking to attract buyers from outside the Glens Falls region?**

BL: Absolutely. We are looking for a market share to include people from New York City to Montréal, from Boston to Western New York. Glens Falls is an attractive alternative for people who want to relocate to a safe, user friendly small city. I see Glens Falls as a shining light in our region—it is at the center of our upstate New York economic growth.

**SM: Where do you see Glens Falls in the next five to ten years?**

BL: The greatest growth in the region will come from the AMD chip factory and the

# Six Stories In The Sky



expansion of the new West Mountain development called Mont Luzerne. Developers are working to create a community of several thousand people on the west side. West Mountain is a fabulous amenity for downtown Glens Falls. Not only is West Mountain a beautiful, family-friendly environment, it is a great recreational facility that no other city has in such close proximity. We also have the recreational advantage of Lake George and Saratoga right around the corner. The Great escape is expanding, as is the stent industry, which contributes to job availability. Global Fitness has expanded into Glens Falls in various locations including the Heritage Apartment Complex and The Mill at 20 Elm St. The sky is the limit for Glens Falls in the next decade.

## SM: What is your greatest leadership trait?

BL: I am a determined and persevering visionary. I know what it takes to work with people and see the job through. ❖

