



[Comments](#) | Recommended

## Convention center hotel developer sees it as bridge between Cedars, downtown

10:54 AM CST on Friday, February 20, 2009

By **SHERYL JEAN / The Dallas Morning News**  
[sjean@dallasnews.com](mailto:sjean@dallasnews.com)

Standing on a balcony of the newly opened Beat condo tower, Jack Matthews views his growing empire laid out before him like a patchwork quilt.

He points to his properties in Dallas' Cedars neighborhood just south of downtown. Looking a bit farther north, he spies the site for the proposed downtown convention center hotel. Last summer, his company, Matthews Southwest, beat out two other firms to develop the controversial hotel, throwing the low-profile developer into the spotlight.

Matthews sees the hotel on Young Street between Market and Lamar streets as a bridge linking the Cedars neighborhood to downtown districts such as Deep Ellum and the West End. It's a key step in helping to turn Dallas' South Side, which is cut off from downtown by highways, into a vibrant area.

Matthews already has put a lot of effort into the historic but neglected Cedars area. He has developed more than 1 million square feet, including the Gilley's Dallas entertainment venue and the South Side on Lamar development.

Still, the Cedars is a sea of vacant land and parking lots. Matthews hopes to change that.

Building in his blood

Matthews, 51, grew up in Ontario, Canada, where his parents and six sisters still live. His father owned a construction company.

"My memories growing up are with my dad in the back of his Buick going to construction sites [starting] at 5," he said.

Matthews joined the family business in 1982 at the age of 24. He left in 1991 and became chief executive of airport developer Paxport International. That move ended in "self-exile" after Paxport's \$1.5 billion contract to expand the Toronto airport was canceled.

Matthews moved his wife, Laura, and four children from the Toronto suburbs to the Dallas area in 1994.

[CLICK IMAGE TO ENLARGE](#)



**MICHAEL MULVEY/DMN**  
**On a balcony at the Beat, developer Jack Matthews** has a view of downtown - and the sea of vacant land and parking lots in the Cedars, a South Side neighborhood he is working to restore to vibrancy.

He keeps a foot in Canada, developing several large office buildings there, including EnCana Corp.'s 59-story tower in Calgary, Alberta, which will be one of Canada's tallest buildings when it opens in 2011.

His Texas projects range from residential to big-box stores. The largest is the Tribute, a 1,600-acre lakeside golf and residential development in The Colony. But the best-known is his three-year rehabilitation of the massive Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog complex into 450 apartments, shops and offices called South Side on Lamar.

That's the cornerstone of what Matthews wants to be his signature Dallas project.

He began buying land in the Cedars a decade ago. Today, Matthews owns more than 50 acres along South Lamar Street. The land, including some farther south, is valued at more than \$55 million.

The art of the deal

Matthews looks to build up undervalued property. He likes to use sustainable design and materials, such as salvaged wood floors. Last summer, he dragged his wife to restoration shops while on vacation in France.

Matthews' mantra is "do the right thing."

"We like to make money, but it's not our No. 1 motivation," he said. Matthews Southwest posted 2008 revenue of about \$350 million, he said. The Lewisville company and its affiliates employ about 120.

"He has helped us out as far as what to do and letting us look at his projects," said Marcus Shropshire, one of five friends being mentored by Matthews about real estate development. "He's a very genuine guy. You can admire that."

Matthews is old-fashioned, sometimes sealing a deal with a handshake.

"He's very much a guy whose word is his bond," said Tom Hofstedter, chief executive of Ontario-based H&R Real Estate Investment Trust, which invests in some of Matthews' projects. "He's extremely honorable. That's why you do business with Jack."

Matthews estimates that his \$350 million portion of the convention center hotel will be his largest local investment. He hopes to start work in April.

"One thing that's pretty interesting about his approach is that he has a good sense of neighborhood," said Larry Hamilton, chief executive of Hamilton Properties, which is developing a hotel north of the Dallas Convention Center. "We might have been a little more concerned if another developer was chosen. We think it's important to have a new development corridor connection to the Cedars, Main Street, Deep Ellum and the West End."

Matthews' master plan for the South Side, by London-based Foster + Partners, calls for more entertainment and retail. Observing the urban planning wisdom that retail follows rooftops, he wants to build more residences first. The area already has a DART light rail station.

His latest project, the Beat condos, is the second South Side residential development.

Matthews already did something about making the Cedars safer. He gave Dallas land where the city

built its police headquarters.

## **JACK MATTHEWS**

**Birthplace:** London, Ontario, Canada.

**Age:** 51.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree and MBA, University of Western Ontario.

**Experience:** President of Matthews Southwest, Lewisville, 1994-present; CEO of Paxport International, Ontario, 1991-1993; president of Matthews Group Ltd., Ontario, 1982-1991.

**Board memberships:** The Real Estate Council and Trinity Trust Foundation.

**Family:** Wife, Laura; four children, Shannon, 22, John, 21, Samantha, 19, Victoria, 16.

**Interests:** Hockey, family, salvaged and antique architectural materials.

**What you didn't know:** Plays in a hockey league as a defenseman.

## **MATTHEWS sOUTHWEST'S MAJOR PROJECTS**

- Proposed \$525 million convention center hotel in Dallas
- South Side on Lamar, a Dallas development that includes apartments, offices, restaurants and retail
- Gilley's Dallas
- Beat condos in Dallas
- 1,600-acre Tribute community in The Colony
- Big-box retail in Dallas and Irving
- Retail and residential developments in Coppell, Frisco, Grand Prairie and Lewisville
- A 59-story headquarters under construction in Calgary, Alberta
- A 36-story tower in Calgary
- Office, retail and industrial buildings in Ontario, Canada