Company owner shrugs off others' descriptions of him as a visionary

BY MARIANNA RILEY
Of the Post-Dispatch

From his commodious corner office on the sixth floor of his own building at the entrance to Chesterfield Mall, Louis Sachs can look in every direction and see what he's accomplished in 35 years of developing real estate.

On a clear day, he can see the Arch. His company, Sachs Electric, handled the wiring for it. In all other directions, he can see his work: a 1,500-acre development named Chesterfield Village, which is the heart of Chesterfield, a city that was formed around his property and his vision.

Although others may call him a visionary, Sachs, a small, dignified, quiet, determined and focused man, doesn't buy that characterization. He shakes his head when asked if he thinks of himself in those terms. "No," he said, with a slight smile.

"This is how I look at it: If I'm able to go to heaven and I can look down and see what I've done, I want to be able to say to myself, 'Gee, that's pretty nice.'"

Louis Sachs, developer
The development of Chesterfield Village

1967 -- Louis Sach, acquires 37 acres at Highway 40 and Olive Boulevard for an apartment development.
1970 -- After becoming aware of a county plan designating the area as a center for future development, Sachs assembles more land and begins a study to determine its development potential. In a chance meeting, he learns of plans for a large shopping center. Sachs buys more land and lures the shopping center to his development.
1975 -- Sachs Properties builds its first Chesterfield Village project, a 30,000-square-foot office building at 16300 Justus Post Road.
1976 -- Chesterfield Mall opens in the southwest quadrant of Highway 40 and Olive-Clarkson Road. Sachs Electric Co. moves its headquarters to Chesterfield Village.
1979 -- Sachs Properties sells 210 acres for the Monsanto Life Science Center. The company also completes three office buildings: 333 Chesterfield Center, 444 Chesterfield Center and 1415 Elbridge Payne Road.
1980 -- Breckenridge Hotel and Conference Center open in Chesterfield to bring hotel, conference and recreational facilities to Chesterfield Village. The hotel later becomes the Doubletree Hotel and Conference Center. The company completes two more buildings within the Elbridge Payne office park.
1981 -- Sachs Properties opens the Hilltown Village Shopping Center, anchored by a Schnucks.
1984 -- The largest office building at that time in Chesterfield Village, the six-story 400 Chesterfield Center, is completed.
1987 -- Herman Stemme Office Park opens with the 50,000-square-foot Herman Stemme I along Olive Boulevard at 901 Roosevelt Parkway.
1988 -- Sachs Properties completes its 23,000-square-foot Olive/Forty Office Building at 16100 North Outer Forty.
1993 -- The Missouri River floods Chesterfield Valley.
1994 -- Sachs Properties assists in the rebuilding effort in Chesterfield Valley with a $500,000 building on 3-1/2 acres fronting on Highway 40 to house its landscaping and maintenance departments.
1996 -- Sachs Properties announces plans for 154,000-square-foot Chesterfield Ridge Center at Highway 40 and Swingley Ridge Road.
1998 -- Chesterfield Ridge Center, a 154,000-square-foot building and the largest in the village to date, is completed.
2010 -- Projected completion date for the $1 billion Chesterfield Village.

Developer

Sachs is quietly leaving his mark on Chesterfield

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More than 30 years ago, a good 20 years before Chesterfield was incorporated, Sachs assembled the parcels of land that would become Chesterfield Village.

The master plan that he subsequently developed for it has for the most part been followed.

He has made major contributions to make possible the YMCA and the Jewish Community Center. He developed a plan for landscaping at major intersections in Chesterfield. He buried overhead utility lines that he considered unattractive --- some of which went across Highway 40. He built a major part of what has become the circumferential road called Chesterfield Parkway. He has made major contributions to Faust County Park.

His list of accomplishments also includes serving on the boards of many of the top civic and cultural institutions in the St. Louis area.

Recently, Sachs was named citizen of the year by the Chesterfield City Council. John Hammond, who nominated him, has not always been in Sachs' corner. Hammond, in fact, was part of a group that actively opposed a development that Sachs Properties was planning a few years ago.

Like so many others, Hammond used the word vision in his nomina-
tion: "Louis Sachs had the vision, he had the means and he had the perseverance to develop what is now the commercial core of our city. Along the way, he displayed thoughtfulness and generosity through his funding of projects both institutional and aesthetic, which enhance our community."

Sachs began his career by following his father, Sam Sachs, into electrical contracting. Louis Sachs no longer owns the business, which still bears his name, but he likes to tell how his father became involved in the business.

Born in Lithuania, Sam Sachs came to this country at age 3. His father, also Louis Sachs, came to Desloge, Mo. where he started out as a peddler and walked from one small town to the next carrying various dry goods on his back. He graduated to a horse and buggy, and eventually operated his own store.

The first 'Louis Sachs' house had no electricity. When the enterprising young Sam Sachs was old enough, he got a battery and installed lights in his family's home.

After he graduated from Washington University with a degree in electrical engineering, Sam Sachs went to work on the night shift at Union Electric. Somewhere along the way Sam Sachs met Dena Sacks, a school teacher at Hamilton School in the west end of St. Louis, and they married.

One fortuitous night he fell asleep, and for that he was fired. Soon after, he started his own business. That was in 1925, three years before his son, Louis Sachs, was born.

Chesterfield Village

Following in his father's footsteps, Sachs earned a degree in electrical engineering at Washington University. Thirty-five years ago, he decided to branch out from the electrical contracting business and go into real estate development.

In that early phase, he built medical buildings at Delmar Boulevard and McKnight Road and Clayton and Big Bend roads along with one in Kansas City. He had an apartment develop-
Louis Sachs relaxes in his office. He has been working on the development of Chesterfield for more than 30 years. He assembled 550 acres in Chesterfield, and the property now has about $1 billion in development.

But he deplored his lack of control in each of these. Inevitably something he disliked would be built next door. He has an almost dreamy look in his eyes as he looks back: "There was a tract of land out here zoned for apartments. It's where the Sears-Roebuck store is now."

Seeing the potential in this undeveloped spot, he started assembling what would come to 60 pieces of property for the planned residential, commercial and recreational area that he envisioned. He called it Chesterfield Village. Before that, the only Chesterfield in the area was a post office and a train stop in the flood plain to the west, now known as Old Chesterfield.

As he recalled this, Sachs pointed to early pictures of far west St. Louis County. They showed mostly rough wooded, undeveloped land, interrupted occasionally by patches of plowed fields.

When he heard in 1970 that a shopping center was planned for the intersection of Clayton and Clarkson roads, he intervened and persuaded the future owners of Chesterfield Mall, the Jacobs Co., to consider moving slightly to the northwest, to Clarkson and Highway 40, to the property he was assembling.

He was successful. Work on assembling the necessary property began in 1967. That was accomplished, the county zoning department gave the project its blessing in 1970, and the shopping center was completed in 1972.

Altogether, he figures there are now 3,000 residential units on property he's owned. In addition, he owns 1 million square feet of commercial buildings and land that could be developed into 2,000 more residential units and 7 million square feet of office space.

He figures that taxes from his developments come to about $5 million a year. From buildings he owns, Sachs pays about $1.5 million in real-estate taxes. There's about $1 billion worth of development on his 550 acres.

When Sachs heard that the YMCA was planning to build a center on Clayton Road, five miles to the west, he again took action. "I thought it would be an asset to Chesterfield," he said. With Sachs' land as an incentive, the Y agreed. He also built a theater there.

A similar situation occurred when the Jewish Community Center wanted to expand westward a few years ago.
They built on property Sachs provided on Wild Horse Creek Road at Baxter. Sachs considers that he's "off to a good start" on his vision. "I started here when I was 38 years old; I'm now 71 and I still have a lot to do here," he said.

These days

These days, Sachs spends one week each month at this Chesterfield home, and the rest of his time he's at his home in Maryland on Chesapeake Bay. He fell in love with the area when he was on a trip with a friend and sailing enthusiast. "We like the area, we bought a boat and we looked around and bought a house," he said. He later sold the boat, but he and his wife, Mary Sachs, have populated their 10 acres there with four llamas and two Portuguese water dogs named George and Gracie of whom he says with a smile, "They really love me."

A lover of music and a patron of the arts, Sachs doesn't care much about organized sports. He learned to fly on a two-year Army stint in the early '50s and continued to fly until about 10 years ago as an amateur pilot. He also enjoyed boating for many years.

But one impromptu sporting event that he relishes took place within his own family on the field at Busch Stadium. "We did the lighting for it," he explained. The night before the stadium opened, as he and his employees were taking meter readings on the floodlights for the field, he and his children, Steve, Susie and Peter, played their own game on the field.

Just as he would not apply the term visionary to himself, Sachs doesn't think he particularly bashful, as some of his friends and colleagues suggest. Soft-spoken and direct, Sachs agrees that he is not particularly outgoing. He hates the banter of banquets -- "it's just talk, and they're not saying anything; I don't go for that" -- and would not describe himself as friendly although he adds, "I think I have friends."

Probably more than he realizes, says Hammond, the man who nominated Sachs for citizen of the year. Hammond served with Sachs on the Chesterfield Arts Commission, of which Sachs is one of the originators. "So much of what he does turns out right and beautiful and nobody gives him credit for it," Hammond said. "The majority of all the things he's done have been such a positive influence on our community and we probably don't know all the things he's done."

"He's brought some Fortune 500 companies to Chesterfield," real-estate developer Tom Shaw said of Sachs. "Everything he's done has been of the type and quality to subsidize the value of all the homes in Chesterfield."

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