

Commercial Real Estate

# Visionary Landmark Award: Barry Cain of Gramor Development



Gramor Development President Barry Cain at the Vancouver Waterfront.

SAM GEHRKE

By Denise Szott – Contributing writer

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Gramor Development President Barry Cain says that from an early age, “I’ve always felt that if I put my head down and worked hard, good things would happen.”

It’s easy to see what an understatement that was. Cain has gone on to have a nearly four-decade career creating mixed-use, high-quality environments that leave a positive impact on communities.

The commercial real estate developer started out focusing on small, automotive-related centers before moving on to more ambitious projects with a wider retail scope, and now his company has tallied some 70 developments totaling over 4 million square feet.

But for Cain, the crown jewel in his career has been developing the Vancouver waterfront, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Learning that Boise Cascade was closing its paper mill, Cain put in a bid to develop the Vancouver property in spring 2006.

“It was obvious to me that good things were going to happen for the city when the paper plant was gone,” Cain said. “We wanted to make a statement about the future of Vancouver, and we didn’t want to regret later that we didn’t do all we could.”

Gramor’s bid won and the purchase was completed in 2008. Leveraging partnerships with the city, Clark County and investors, construction started in 2016 and continues to roll. Currently, Gramor is building an 850-space parking garage under Block 7.

Cain sees the benefit in having variety in his projects to avoid a cookie-cutter look. “We did the buildings (at the waterfront) that it took to get started, but didn’t use the same architect on each one,” he says.

Adding to the site’s unique look is artist Larry Kirkland’s Grant Street Pier, which serves as the area’s signature focal point.

“(Larry’s) used to doing projects that are meant to last forever,” like a disabled veterans memorial in Washington, D.C., and “that’s why we had him do the water feature representing the Columbia River Basin,” Cain said.

The development process has changed dramatically since Cain started out, becoming more complicated and cumbersome, not suited to those lacking patience.

“We’ve ended up working on more potential projects at a time just so we can always have something under construction,” he said.



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Gramor typically starts construction on one or two projects a year, which means another 10 or 15 projects are in the pipeline.

“If you want to work with the best and most interesting properties, you need to be way out ahead,” he said. “Many times, we worked on properties 10 and even 20 years.”

One of those that’s been on an extended timeline is a 101,000-square-foot shopping center at Reeds Crossing in South Hillsboro, anchored by Market of Choice. The development planning began at least 20 years ago but faced significant headwinds – bringing the land into the urban growth boundary, environmental and engineering studies, permitting and processes all took time. Construction is finally set to begin Aug. 1.

Most recently, Gramor built a 38,000-square-foot retail center at the entrance to Newberg and wine country.

Cain doesn't rely on deep economic or demographic analysis when deciding to pursue projects. Instead, he taps a gut feeling about what makes sense.

"I live here and experience where the growth is going and where the opportunities are by just being here." And, he added, "I hate to lose."

**Company:** Gramor Development Inc.

**Job title:** President

**Years with the company:** 38 years

**Number of employees:** 20