

Jeff Zavitz



There are spaces in Uptown Waterloo that are teeming with life today because Jeff Zavitz saw hope where others saw only a vacant lot or an old building. His love of the city's core, coupled with a joy for swinging a hammer in the sunshine, has brought a youthful energy to the changing face of Waterloo.

Some of the more notable projects Zavitz helped develop are the Princess Twin Cinemas, the Waterloo Entertainment Centre, and the Regina Street Commons on the corner of Regina and Dupont Streets.

As co-owner of Tavis-Roland Development Inc., Zavitz has enjoyed playing a part in the evolving landscape of Waterloo's core. "It's kind of incremental growth, steady improvement," he said once. "On the whole I think people are feeling fairly positive about the fact that there are changes in the core; there are things happening."

His first major project - the Regina Street Commons - began after he finished an architecture degree at the University of Waterloo. Along with his friend and business partner, Graham Whiting, the young entrepreneur turned a gravel lot into a cluster of three-storey mixed-use buildings that house youth-oriented businesses like the Generation X video store. The idea was to encourage young entrepreneurs to share space, advertise together and lend moral support to one another. "Jeff has altruistic reasons behind his work," Mike Greaves of Generation X, said once. "He's trying to make Waterloo a better place for people to be."

Zavitz and Whiting did almost all of the work on the Regina Street Commons themselves with the support of family and friends. "And it is tricky because it is friends," Zavitz said once. "It is wonderful, but it requires more people skills than just barking orders and walking away."

As Zavitz became more involved in the Uptown - even buying and renovating a home in the neighbourhood for himself - he became more vocal about his vision. As the chairman of the board of directors for the Uptown Waterloo Business Improvement Area (BIA) for the past eight years, Zavitz has given a voice to the city's young residents.

His next major project involved turning a former furniture store into the new Princess Twin Cinemas. Along with partner John Tutt, Zavitz spent \$1.6 million to buy and renovate the old store in the heart of Waterloo. Later his company bought the former Waterloo Stage Theatre. He rejected many tempting offers before finally settling on a tenant who wanted to retain its original purpose. The old theatre eventually reopened as the Waterloo Entertainment Centre, a financial gamble for Zavitz who put the city's cultural future before his own bottom line.

Zavitz has been called, in jest, the “Donald Trump” of Uptown Waterloo but he is really a contemporary community booster with a conscience; a businessman who just so happens to have a flair for design. It’s a combination of qualities that has been good both for Zavitz and for Waterloo residents who like to walk around their core area and see live theatre, take in a movie and enjoy a drink afterwards.

Jeff Zavitz said once, “It’s great to walk into these places, look around and say to myself, ‘Hey, I did this’.”

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