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Local spotlight

## Firm's rapport key in hard-to-assemble projects

Developer is willing to go door-to-door to put together the land needed for Canton retail center.

Neal Haldane / Special to The Detroit News

**FARMINGTON HILLS** -- Steve Schafer and his team have helped Canton Township say goodbye to the Barbu Motel and hello to a new \$40 million development that will house a Kohl's, Target and other stores.

To assemble property for deals like this, Schafer said he goes door-to-door, presses the flesh with property owners, brings in spaghetti dinners and does what it takes to complete the pact.

For the Canton project, Schafer Development worked with 12 property owners, some of whom had 50 years' worth of history with the land.

"This was in the wave of growth Canton Township has experienced in the past couple years," said Schafer, president of the firm that bears his name. "These were not homes with 'for sale' signs on them. I banged on doors."

Once development starts on the 30-acre site, the Canton Promenade will benefit the community by removing old structures, adding retail opportunities and increasing the tax base, according to Tom Yack, Canton Township Supervisor.

"Steve has gained a reputation among planners and elected officials of undertaking very difficult consolidations -- work that few individuals would undertake," Yack said.

"It takes perseverance and hard work to achieve consolidations, and this is an important step in the development and re-development process."

In the past, Schafer has worked on projects involving more than 100 property owners.

Some recent projects include residential and retail developments in Livonia, Dearborn and West Bloomfield.

The process of redeveloping property will take on greater importance in the years ahead, especially in already developed areas in southeast Michigan, said Steve Robinson, president of Silverman Development in Bingham Farms and a member of the Urban Land Institute.

Fifty years ago, a corner hardware store required a small parcel, but with Home Depot and Lowe's, additional land needs to be assembled to handle larger retail footprints, Robinson said.

"It's important to re-supply those spaces for today's retailers," he said. "It's pretty risky and very hard to do. Once you start, it's very time-consuming and you might spend a lot of time in living rooms."

But Schafer said he enjoys finding sites with potential, bringing the owners together and completing the deal.

"I've always found it a challenge to work on people myself," he said.

"It's important to get personal rapport, and I have a pretty good track record."

Schafer Development has opened an office in Florida and is working on a pair of 120-acre industrial park projects in Tampa.

But the company also continues to work in Michigan, including assembling land for retail projects in Commerce Township and Detroit, a medical campus in Canton Township, a mixed-use development in Novi and a residential site in Plymouth.

*Neal Haldane is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.*

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### Schafer Development

**Headquarters:** Farmington Hills

**Employees:** 5

**Specialty:** Land assembly for retail, industrial and mixed-use projects

**Information:** [www.schafer-dev.com](http://www.schafer-dev.com)

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