

Whiz kids aim for the sky

Young executives of 1980 want a luxurious lifestyle now and they feel it's theirs to have

By JULIA MASKOULIS
of The Gazette

Jonathan Wener is one of the few people in Montreal who can say he turned down a \$125,000-a-year executive job.

Earlier this year, Wener, approaching the age of 30, came to a turning point in his life.

He quit his job as executive vice-president of First Quebec Corporation, a privately owned real estate development firm with a staff of 30.

"I went out West looking for a job and had several offers from companies in the \$125,000-a-year range. After a lot of soul-searching, I decided to turn them down.

"It was time to go into business for myself."

In June this year, just before his 30th birthday, Wener opened Canderel Ltd., a real estate development company and one of the partners in the \$10-million office complex now under construction on Peel St. and de Maisonneuve Blvd.

Dream come true

For Wener, it was a dream come true. But for many other Montrealers, 1980 has been anything but a dream.

This year the average wage-earner continued an unending battle with inflation. Homeowners with mortgages up for renewal prayed for mortgage rates, which peaked at 17.75 per cent in April, to fall.

But for six people, all around age 30, interviewed by *The Gazette*, 1980 has been the best year of their lives.

Mireille Lafleur, an account executive with Jean-D. Legault & Ass. publicity firm got promoted to vice-president in May.

Stephen Leopold, who opened his own business in office leasing three years ago, says this year was so lucrative, he rewarded himself by moving into a downtown penthouse.

What makes this group different? Is it luck or drive that helped them get ahead?

They're in the cream of the crop of Canada's more than four million 25-to-35-year-olds, the grown-up babies of the post-Second World War baby boom.

As part of the baby boom, today's 25- to 35-year-olds face formidable competition for advancement in the job market.

In 1951, when their parents were job-hunting, there were slightly more than 4 million people in the Canadian labor force, according to Statistics Canada. By 1976, the labor force had nearly doubled, to 7 1/4 million people.

Yet these young people say they aren't aware of being part of the baby boom.

"I never stopped to think about the competition," laughs Wener. "I just go after what I want."

Mireille Lafleur echoes the same sentiment: "I work because I want in-



Jonathan Wener, right, turned down several job offers to form his own development company



Mireille Lafleur can't see herself 'just staying at home'



Brenda Murray
Christmas in Puerto Rico

Instead, the favored technique is to job-hop, moving quickly when a better position or higher salary is offered.

After dropping out of McGill University law school at the end of his second year, Leopold got a job with Devencore Realities, a commercial real estate company, as a leasing agent.

He next took a job as vice-president of La Compagnie Hypothecaire Marciel, a mortgage and investment firm. He stayed with the firm a year.

In four years of working he saved \$50,000. "I was an aggressive salesman," he explains succinctly.

At age 25, with his own savings plus another \$50,000 from the bank, he opened Leopold Properties Ltd.

Leopold's job is to find rental space for clients. He earns a commission — about 30 per cent — of the annual rent of the property.

If he negotiates a lease for 15,000 feet at \$18 a square foot (a rough average for downtown rates) for one year, the annual rent will be \$270,000. His commission will be \$81,000. But to complete a deal of this kind can take from five months to a year.

dependence. Having money is freedom."

"But it's not just money," explains Stephen Leopold. "It's self-gratification. It's the challenge. The turn-on of making a deal."

In 1978, the average annual Canadian income for men between 25 to 34 years of age was \$15,907. The average income for women was \$9,154.

Yet these young whiz kids are already earning more than \$25,000 annually — \$4,000 more than the average income of men over 35 years of age in 1978.

Single 25-year-olds in the United States recently surveyed for an article in *Fortune Magazine*, a business publication, earn a median of \$20,000, well above the median U.S. family income, estimated at around \$17,040.

These 25-year-olds will progress more quickly into upper-income brackets than most of their predecessors would have dreamed possible, concluded the article, based on a survey of 82 people in the United States.

As this group marries, probably to a spouse working full-time and also earning a good salary, they will constitute a new financial "superclass."

They aren't content to pay their dues, as their fathers may have had to, and achieve a comfortable lifestyle later on.

Many of them went through a rebellious stage during their adolescence. They grew their hair, lived in

communes, and rejected the work ethic.

They claim a '60s heritage, and in their minds, this morally distinguishes them from previous generations of businessmen.

Leopold, at 28 a broker and consultant in office leasing, says, "I have a stronger social consciousness because of the '60s. I'm not interested in a dog-eat-dog approach. I'm not ready to ride roughshod over people.

"I'm not interested in manufacturing chemicals that poison our environment just to make money."

Leopold is the eldest of two sons of a successful Montreal businessman who was involved in real estate and development.

"What motivates me is that I like being my own boss, taking the blame and credit for everything I do."

Leopold grew up in the kind of neighborhood where most teenagers "either had access to a car or owned a car." His parents bought him his own car at 18 when he entered university.

"My parents had strong expectations of me. They always encouraged me to get ahead, always to give the best effort at whatever I chose to do.

"They could have afforded to buy me anything I wanted. But they didn't; they always encouraged me to go out and earn the money for whatever I wanted."

Few in this get-ahead crowd see long-term loyalty to a particular firm as useful.

The young entrepreneur is married, has no children, and says his greatest support is his wife, Lorna, a nurse. He says he prefers to travel rather than work weekends.

Hard work

Early success doesn't mean less work. Leopold says he wakes up earlier today than he did two years ago and he works harder: "When I get up at 5:30 a.m., none of the lights are on downtown."

Jonathan Wener also says hard work got him where he is today. The work, in his case, was physical labor, not the mentally taxing type he is now involved in.

Wener got his introduction to development as a summer student working on construction sites. He earned a substantial salary for the late 1960s — about \$400 a week — and saved most of it, always with the idea of one day owning his own business.

After graduating from Sir George Williams University (now Concordia) with a Bachelor of Commerce degree, Wener was hired as leasing manager by First Quebec Corporation. By this time, he had already acquired several years experience in real estate through summer jobs. When he left this year to open Canderel, he was executive vice-president.

Just as Wener gave up the traditional successes within a corporate structure — the \$125,000 salary that he turned down, the vice-president's chair that he quit — he also spurns the old-style status symbols, expensive clothes, expensive cars.

"I always wait until shirts are on sale for \$14. I never buy \$40 shirts. I could have gone out this year and bought a Mercedes, but why bother? A car only gets you from point A to point B." He drives a year-old Chevy station wagon.

But don't be misled. In many cases, it's just a question of old-style symbols being replaced with new. While the generation before him may have preferred Cadillacs and mink coats, today's go-getters prefer longer holidays and more of them.

True success

Wener's goal is to be able to take his wife and two children — a third is on the way — on a cruise around the world in a few years. To him, the freedom and money to be able to do that is the true sign of success.

Brenda Murray, 30, associate creative director of Foster Advertising, one of the top three advertising companies in Canada with annual billings of \$100 million, also spends her salary of "between \$30,000 and \$40,000" on travel.

Murray, the eldest of three children of an executive with MacMillan Bloedel Ltd., Canada's largest manufacturer of pulp, paper and lumber, didn't ever finish secondary school. Her father was posted to England when she was in her third year of high school.

She did complete one year of college and a secretarial course and worked for three London advertising agencies moving from one to the other for a better job or more money. In 1972 she came to Montreal.

This year she was promoted from copy writer to the No. 3 person in the creative department in Foster's Montreal branch. She supervises a staff of 10.

"Within a year of joining Foster I had started writing copy," she recalls. "I became a senior writer and then in 1976 I left to open my own agency with two partners. I thought it would be good for my career to work on my own."

But she didn't enjoy some of the work that being in a smaller agency entailed. "Being on my own taught me a lot. It gave me a healthy respect for money and how it's spent. It made me conscious of waste."

Two years later Murray left the company, which is still being run by one of the partners, and went back to her old job. Despite her success, Murray doesn't see herself as competitive. "The only thing I've felt competitive about is horses," she laughs. But her background indicates a great respect for money.

"We were brought up very strictly. We were taught the value of money at an early age and we were brought up to think that we're all in control of our own destiny."

No kids

Mireille Lafleur, 28, has postponed having a family for her career.

"I can't see myself with two kids and a house in Outremont," says Lafleur, who was promoted to vice-president of Jean-D. Legault & Ass. publicity firm this year. She earns "more than \$25,000" annually.

Lafleur grew up in St-Leonard, one of two daughters. Her parents encouraged her to do whatever she wanted to do. At 13 she got her first jobs babysitting and working as a sales clerk in a corner store after school.

She continued to work even while she was enrolled full-time in McGill University studying languages.

She was half-way through her Master of Arts in French and Italian literature at McGill when she became disillusioned with teaching, quit, and found a job with the newly-opened agency. She was one of four employees.

Today there are 10, and she supervises the handling of 30 accounts. "I enjoy earning money. I like to travel and dress well. I hate to stay home and do housework.

"But I guess what really drives me is a desire to be independent. If you don't work, you're limited in the number of things you can do. I like to be able to order a bottle of champagne when I feel like it without worrying about the cost."

Michael Prupas, 30, a lawyer, once lived on a commune and once worked with the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO). He encompasses the complexity and contradictions in the baby boom kids.

He had a comfortable childhood and adolescence in Westmont — a milieu in which he once felt "alienated," but which, in the years since, he's begun to recreate for himself.

Today, dressed in a tailored suit and sitting in an attractive Westmont office, he rubs shoulders with bankers and financiers and talks about million-dollar movie deals.

But he sometimes feels guilty about "it" — the "it" he defines as success and the material comforts of money.

"A lot of qualities remain from the '60s. I'm loyal and empathetic, I try to treat other people's problems like my own. This gives me a good rapport with many of my clients who are movie people and tend to be anti-establishment types."

Just graduated from law school two years ago, this year he quit a secure job with a corporate law firm to open his own. "I didn't want to be number 24 out of 36 on a letterhead," he says.

In a crowd of four million, you have to be prepared to work hard and move fast to make sure you're not.



Lorna and Stephen Leopold in their downtown penthouse: They work hard, but keep weekends free to travel