

**TED
BLACKMAN**



Shopping mall finds champion

A Don Quixote may have emerged from the so far silent constituency to organize independent opinion in favor of Cadillac Fairview's plans for the development of McGill College Ave.

"I'm willing to be the lightning rod," says Stephen Leopold, who arranges commercial leases for corporate clients through his company, Leopold Properties Inc. "A survey of our clients indicates 90 per cent in favor of the project and, as a concerned Montreal businessman, I want their voices heard."

Among his first backers for an upcoming media blitz is McLeod, Young, Weir, one of Canada's largest investment dealers and a key tenant in Place Mercantile at the northern head of the street. The Royal Bank and CN are likely to throw their weight behind the concept.

Though only 32, Leopold has quite a history of tilting at windmills. He served as an investigator on Sen. Sam Ervin's Watergate committee, ran (and lost) for a council seat against the Civic party in '74 and was a key worker for Brian Mulroney in his first leadership bid.

"I was spurred to action by a CBC newscast the other night when a reporter said 'The Montreal business community is still opposed to Cadillac Fairview's modified plan' and I hollered at my TV set: 'You're not speaking for me or a lot of my clients.'"

Not acting for property owners

Leopold says he has no axes to grind. Unlike Devencore Realities, which has exclusive leasing contracts with buildings in the McGill College area and whose directors have led the chorus of opposition, Leopold acts only on behalf of tenants and has no property owners' interests to protect.

"I was against the project at the beginning, but only because it proposed to block the street," he says. "But since they've modified the plan to leave an important thoroughfare open in an already-congested area, I'm all in favor. Moreover, I think it's vital to the city."

How vital?

"The most important commercial project to come off the drawing boards in this city since Place Ville Marie more than a quarter-century ago. We embarked on a solution to our winter tourist doldrums by beginning to create a worldwide image of being the most advanced indoor, underground city.

"Well, this is just a natural enhancement of that program and sponsored by Cadillac Fairview, masters of this type of endeavor. Forget the fact they built Toronto's Eaton Centre and just look at their projects here: Fairview, Carrefour Laval, Galleries d'Anjou, St. Bruno, four of the best!"

City needs outside money

Not mentioned in my Thursday column was the fact that of the \$500 million annual business done in Toronto's Eaton Centre, \$200 million are new dollars coming from outside the city and particularly from the U.S. Leopold says this type of input is critical to Montreal's economy.

"I want help paying my tax bills," he says. "I want tourists paying sales tax. I want help finding employment for our unemployed. I want 6,000 construction jobs for two years on McGill College. I want 2,000 permanent jobs in a shopping complex that, if you look at it, is twice as big as Eaton Centre.

"How so? Well, Eaton centre has Eaton's store, Simpsons and 304 other tenants. Cadillac Fairview would connect Eaton's, Simpsons and the Bay, 200 retailers in its arcade, 46 at 2020 University, another 30 at 2001 University and 145 in Les Terrasses. Talking about winning back bragging rights from Toronto!"

Leopold says the arguments against the project are weak.

"The view of the mountain? Yeah, that corner is just clogged with Greyhound tourist buses, isn't it? A Champs Elysees? Paris has l'Arc de Triomphe at one end and the Louvre at the other. We'll have McGill's gates and PVM's parking garage as boulevard bookends. Tourists from Boston would just flock to see that, huh?"

'Son of Dorchester Blvd.'

"When it comes down to a choice between a widened street and no project or a new project and no widening, I'll take the latter. Without the development of a retail shopping complex the area will eventually become just another two-block string of office towers, the Son of Dorchester Blvd.

"Just look at Dorchester for a moment. There's your so-called boulevard. Take any section, Guy to Fort, Peel to University, Bleury to St. Lawrence... deserted after six o'clock at night. Is that what we want for McGill and de Maisonneuve? I'd rather see 2,000 people coming out of a concert hall at 10:30 at night, strolling in comfort and security."

Leopold also addresses the question of what happens to existing merchants on St. Catherine St. if their customers are drawn like moths to an indoor facility on McGill College Ave.

"That decision — where to shop — belongs solely to me and two million Montrealers," he says. "Not to anyone else. If I'm offered a choice of shopping in comfort indoors in January or negotiating the slush on the sidewalk, I'm entitled to the offer and to the choice.

"The outdoor merchants will have their day, too. You know Montrealers. As soon as there's a warm spring day they'll desert the indoor malls for a window shopping jaunt down St. Catherine. And there'll be more of them, suburbanites and tourists, to do it.

"Arguing against an indoor retail complex on that premise is about as logical as indoor retailers protesting against the sunshine in May. And as futile, I hope."