

## SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

*For Bijou, building neighborhoods is a top priority*

By Joshua Burd

**B**ijou Properties has grown its footprint in Hoboken over nearly 15 years, starting with a former Hostess plant on 14th Street that now houses 42,000 square feet of retail space.

Even then, the firm was trying to think beyond a single parcel — giving way to the two high-end residential buildings it developed on the northern and eastern sides of the complex.

“If you look at our projects, they’re all pockets of development,” said Dave Gaber, a Bijou partner and its chief financial officer. “It’s really just taking the few areas left that are in need of redevelopment and just establishing a neighborhood and making it a real place.”

It’s been a common thread as Bijou has made its mark on the lesser-known northern and western ends of

Hoboken, not only with successful residential projects, but with new retail spaces that can draw foot traffic and activity beyond those who live in the area. In doing so, the firm has helped open new frontiers in its home city, which remains as popular as ever.



Dave Gaber

Bijou is now sparking activity in two additional neighborhoods as part of its busy construction pipeline. About two blocks west of the Hostess building, the firm has opened a 40,000-square-foot commercial building that is home to West Elm and Hudson County’s first rock-climbing gym. That project follows a nearby 38-unit rental building that

Bijou opened in 2013, while the firm is now planning a new six-story, 44-unit rental building at 1410 Grand St.

Its largest project to date is also well underway. Last summer, Bijou and Intercontinental Real Estate Corp. broke ground on a 14-story, 424-unit complex at 700 Jackson St. The development also calls for a 6,500-square-foot recreation center and a two-acre park, as part of a plan to improve the westernmost edge of Hoboken and provide additional benefits to the city.

“Essentially, what you see today was part of the process with the community and the city of Hoboken,” said Chris Mazzola, development manager with Bijou, when showing the plans for 700 Jackson. “So we really like to think of it as a public-private partnership in that we worked with the city administration

and we also worked with the residents to create a win-win situation for everyone. ... There's a multitude of things that this area is really starved for."

Including a park and recreation center was part of a process that allowed Bijou to "right-size" its plans, Mazzola said, while clustering the units near the 9th Street light rail station and maximizing open space. In the process, Bijou is building on the success of another development that opened in fall 2015, a 135-unit luxury rental project at 900 Monroe St., about a block north of 700 Jackson.



Chris Mazzola

And while the developer is always conscious of the larger neighborhood, Mazzola said its approach is not one-size-fits-all. For instance, while it donated park space at 700 Jackson, Bijou included a 32,000-square-foot charter school within its Park + Garden project on 15th Street.

"So as we go into each site or project, we look at it contextually in terms of what's needed in that particular localized neighborhood," Mazzola said. He added that many of the firm's employees live in Hoboken in addition to working there, "so we have the benefit of seeing Hoboken not just from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, but all throughout the weekend, in the winter, in the summer. And that really helps you get an idea of what we want and what we think other people want."

A prime example is the firm's new 40,000-square-foot retail and office development at Willow Avenue and 15th Street. In designing the

project, the firm sought to provide new offerings to an area that is lacking services, while drawing new foot traffic from outside the neighborhood. It has seemingly achieved both goals: The space is 92 percent leased to users such as Gravity Vault, a popular indoor rock-climbing gym, and the high-end furniture store West Elm.

"That, to me, is an exciting project because it brings this whole area together," said Larry Bijou, the firm's founder and managing partner.

Other well-known developers own parcels near Bijou's projects and are also looking to tap into Hoboken's lesser developed, formerly industrial sections. Advance Realty in 2016 opened



Larry Bijou

Harlow, a 140-unit luxury building at the corner of 14th Street and Willow Avenue, which features a ground-floor Trader Joe's supermarket that has brought another important service to the neighborhood.

Such a project equates to additional customers for retailers in the area and another amenity for Bijou's residents,



An aerial rendering of 700 Jackson St., Bijou Properties' planned 424-unit development in western Hoboken. Plans also call for a 6,500-square-foot recreation center and a two-acre park.



Slated to open in 2019, 700 Jackson St. is now under construction and will rise 14 stories along the Palisades of western Hoboken.

Gaber said, so the firm welcomes the additional development. Especially considering the high barriers to entry in Hoboken and the city's relatively small construction pipeline, which he said will undoubtedly create pent-up demand.

"In Hoboken, there aren't many options and there is a rising population, so there's really no competition here," Gaber said, estimating that there will be only around 60 to 70 units coming online in the next two years, when Bijou is delivering 700 Jackson. "If there's an area that still needs to be developed,

we don't want it to be a vacant parking lot."

Mazzola said those dynamics make Hoboken especially conducive for Bijou to "effectuate our business model."

"We're very excited about the north end of Hoboken," Mazzola said. "And because we're a large stakeholder in this area, it makes sense for us to be at the leading edge of creating a neighborhood."

The firm, which plans to keep its pipeline full, owns other sites in the city that would allow it to

continue its multi-block approach to development. It's also considering ways to bring additional services to those areas, such as a food hall concept, which Mazzola believes would help fill the void of dining options in uptown Hoboken.

"Putting a restaurant in an untested market can have its consequences," he said. "But when you have 10 to 15 different vendors that have a small footprint and really can focus on the food element, then that business model can work because it can become a destination for everyone in Hoboken." **RENU**

## THINKING GREEN

As Dave Gaber will tell you, the 424-unit project known as 700 Jackson “definitely has all aspects of what we do” at Bijou Properties. That includes green and sustainable building, which has become a hallmark of the firm since its first project in Hoboken.

The developer has sought to mix luxury living with environmentally friendly design through features such as green roofs, recycled building materials and triple-pane windows, along with a heavy focus on light and air. Gaber said the strategy can undoubtedly add to development costs, but that “you’ll also see the return because the operating expenses will be less.”

Bijou has four buildings in Hoboken that have achieved certification on the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED scale, which is short for

Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design. That includes a LEED Platinum certification, a mark that the firm is trying to achieve with at least two future projects.

The results can be appealing to renters who are either socially conscious or are simply seeking a healthier lifestyle. But the business model has also helped foster cooperation from local officials through different administrations, as Bijou has worked through its various projects and as developers in the city contend with community concerns about overbuilding.

“I think there’s a lot of fear that goes into what happens with unbridled development, but there’s no reason to feel that way if it’s done properly,” Larry Bijou said. “And I think it’s a matter of having the right management in place to deal with that for a city.”



Park + Garden, a 212-unit rental project at 1450 Garden St. in Hoboken, was designed for LEED Gold certification when it opened in 2015.

Courtesy: Bijou Properties