



# BUSINESS



## Building a legacy

□ Developer Achs putting unique stamp on downtown

**T**here's no mistaking a Saskatoon property Ken Achs has put his mark on. From the building Starbucks fans line up to get into on Second Avenue and 22nd Street to, some would say most famously, the King George renovation and rehabilitation project just up the road, Achs' work stands out from the crowd.

The president and CEO of the Mid-West Group of Cos. and partner in Meridian Development Corp. took the time to answer five questions asked by StarPhoenix business reporter Cassandra Kyle about the development of Saskatoon.

**SP:** Through Meridian you saw the completion of the King George last year. Meanwhile, the Luxe project on Broadway is almost complete. What are your thoughts on those two projects?



**Achs**

nature of the business. We're an anomaly in the business; we're infinitely more hands-on than 99 per cent of developers.

**SP:** Does Mid-West have any updated plans for a new head office after losing the bid to remodel the Arthur Cook building in the warehouse district?

**KA:** Yes. I just sent a letter to city council about all the time, energy and attention that

has been spent on the south downtown and to date, virtually nothing has happened. They've totally neglected everything in north downtown.

My issue was that they studied and re-studied the bus mall, which should be gone, which has been a detriment

to north downtown. They've been working for the last 10 years to have the 25th Street extension put through, with still no success. And at the same time, as a private developer, we've spent millions of dollars on projects starting from Starbucks to Frakas to King George with no conditions on it — we just go ahead and build.

Our latest project is going to have the largest frontage of any development ever done in the downtown with the exception of Midtown Plaza. We're redoing the old Modern Press building and building a new four-storey office building on the corner. It involves about 400 feet of frontage on Second Avenue and it's going to be an A-class office building with parking. And, it's going to be unique.

We don't get any favours or any special concessions from the city; we just go ahead and do what we have to do to build it. And just for the overall well-being and health of the downtown core, it would be nice if the city could quit studying and focus on cleaning up some of the issues that have been there for years instead of spending all their time and money on south downtown.



—SP Photo by Gord Waldner

**Developer Ken Achs calls the planned revitalization of the Modern Press building on Second Avenue North a 'kind of last hurrah'**

**SP:** Do you think the city's current plan for River Landing is in the best interest of Saskatoon residents?

**KA:** Ask me in 10 years. I don't know, I would like to see something happen there but it's crystal-ball gazing.

If you were to ask anybody in the downtown core in 1968 whether they felt Midtown Plaza was a positive step in the downtown, they would have said, absolutely, 'No.' But the reality is, if it wasn't for Midtown Plaza, Saskatoon's downtown core would be dead.

So, it's hard to say. It depends on the development, the time, how user-friendly it is, if it gets built, all of the above.

**SP:** What area of the city would you like to see developed further?

**KA:** The warehouse district — it's the biggest secret in Saskatoon. It's probably the largest piece of undeveloped core land in any western Canadian city and it's just a secret.

To be fair to the city, there are issues dealing with the railroad, but after 10 years plus you would think you could put a deal together some way.

**SP:** What projects do you have on the go this year?

**KA:** The only thing that I have on the drawing board is our new office building and that's kind of a last hurrah here. I don't want to retire, but I don't want to be as active as I have been and I just want to have a good home for our staff and leave something for the city.

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