

GAME-CHANGER

After 31 years, Mat Swift is retiring from W.C. Bradley after helping to transform downtown Columbus.

BY BRETT BUCKNER • PHOTOS BY MIKE CULPEPPER

Mat Swift isn't one for looking back, and for good reason.

For the past 31 years, Swift has been the president of the W.C. Bradley Company's Real Estate Division. In that time, Swift made it his life's work to help transform downtown Columbus from a point of avoidance to a source of pride. From the Chattahoochee RiverWalk construction in the early 1990s to the \$52 million Rapids at Riverfront Place that broke ground in June, Swift has always focused on the future.

But there is a time for a reflection, even for a man who's always looking ahead.

After three decades as the driving force behind so much of downtown Columbus' revitalization, Mat Swift is retiring from the W.C. Bradley Co.

While Swift hasn't set an official last day—he's aiming for late Fall—he's already making plans for his post-retirement life; plans that, for anyone who knows him, aren't all that surprising.

"I'm not going away," Swift said with a small laugh. "I've

dedicated a lot of my time to creating a vibrant downtown ... so I want to do whatever I can to help maintain the momentum we've started."

In addition to traveling and spending time with his 10 grandchildren, Swift, who turned 70 in August, plans on renting a small downtown office in order to work on small projects.

"The exciting thing for me is that I'll be doing it on my schedule, not someone else's," he said. "That way I can spend time with my grandkids, but as anyone who knows me will say, I probably get more pleasure out of working on downtown projects than just about anything else, so I won't give that up.

"I just won't be getting in anybody's way."

In the weeks before he steps down, Swift will be helping with the transition of his replacement. Pace Halter was named president and chief operating officer for W.C. Bradley's Real Estate Division in June. Halter already had Swift's respect because he had been working with the Bradley Company for two years as a consultant on the Riverfront project through his Halter Companies



consulting firm.

“He was always my top choice for the job,” Swift says of Halter, “and since coming in, he’s really taken the ball and run with it. It’s been a joy for me to see someone with such skill and competence take over.”

Swift admits that there was some “trepidation” on his part about finding someone to take over, given all the projects currently underway in the area. He was also concerned that Halter wouldn’t take the job, given that he was already running his own successful business.

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Pace Halter wasn’t looking for a job. He was more than happy living in Atlanta, running his own business and raising a family. But opportunities like the one offered by W.C. Bradley simply don’t come along very often.

“In fact, I can’t think of anywhere it’s been replicated,” said Halter. “To come into an organization with the stability and history of W.C. Bradley, coupled with the real estate opportunities, where so much of the groundwork has been laid, it was truly a once-in-a-lifetime chance.”

Making the situation all the better was knowing that Swift would stay on board to help with the transition. Their working relationship and the respect the two men already had for one another made what could have been an awkward situation mutually beneficial.

“Working closely with the person you’re



Pace Halter moved from Atlanta to take over the helm of W.C. Bradley Company's Real Estate Division.



replacing can be a negative thing, but that's not the case here," Halter said. "That's what made this so unique. To have someone of [Swift's] stature within the community, with his experience, his knowledge and his leadership ... had it not been set up this way, it would have been so much more daunting."

The way Halter sees it, Columbus, as well as Phenix City and the entire Chattahoochee Valley are poised to reach even greater heights.

"I expect some explosive growth over the next few years," he said. "I'm looking forward to picking up the pace, picking up the tempo, to energizing what is already underway and implementing fresh ideas. We've got really high hopes that are becoming expectations ... and that's a good thing."

In the coming months, Swift will officially step down and happily recede into the background as a new generation takes over what he's been so instrumental in building. But as anyone who's known Swift will attest, being in the background is where he'd rather be.

"He's by definition a behind-the-scenes visionary leader," Richard Bishop, retired president of Uptown Columbus Inc., told the Columbus *Ledger-Enquirer* in May. "He doesn't take near the credit he deserves for all he has helped drive."

It's a leadership style Swift said he learned from Brad Turner,

who first called him so many years ago with the offer to join W.C. Bradley as part of its diversification. Already a successful real estate lawyer at the time, Swift jumped at the chance to help bring Turner's vision of a vibrant downtown to fruition, but it took some on-the-job training.

"As a lawyer, the only people I'd led was my paralegal," he said. "Over there, I had to learn to manage people and projects, and I learned from the best—Brad [Turner], Bill Turner and Steve

Butler—who showed me how to get things done without worrying about getting credit.

It's always a team effort. Without the tackle and the guard doing their part, the half-back won't get the touchdown. I've always enjoyed watching others score."

In a rare moment of reflection on a lifetime of accomplishments, there's one of which Swift is most proud.

"I always come back to the RiverWalk," he said, "not because it cost the most

money. What happened with the RiverWalk is that all of a sudden, the Chattahoochee Valley claimed ownership. Before that it was like pulling teeth to get people downtown. The RiverWalk brought a sense of pride. It transformed people's attitudes of what the downtown could be.

"We had a foundation to build on. It all started there, and it's continuing today." ☺

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