

MONEY

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The exhilarating, high rise of Roger Eisinger

Veteran builder still transforming skylines of Bethesda, Rockville

Another in an occasional Sentinel series profiling business leaders in Montgomery County.

By PETER SCHLOSSMAN
Sentinel Staff Writer

Roger Eisinger is a real estate developer of quiet determination, an unpretentious risk-taker. Colleagues in the development community say Eisinger is a man with guts and the ability to get the job done. They describe him as a pioneer of urban-style development in downtown Bethesda.

Over the past 29 years, he has built four million square feet of office, retail and industrial space in Montgomery County.

And at age 66, Roger Williams Eising-

Profiles in Commerce

er Jr., who matter-of-factly estimates his worth at \$40 million, is in the twilight of his career. Two of his three sons — Renny, 38, and Robert, 36 — stand ready to take over the family business.

But Eisinger still plays an active role in his company, Eisinger Kilbane & Associates, working 60-hour weeks as president and general partner. He continues to make his imprint on the skyline of Montgomery County, most noticeably in Bethesda and Rockville.

His father is a "dreamer and conceptualizer," says Renny, now also a general partner who oversees all construction. "You can't keep him down. He's the kind of guy who will never retire."

"I'm not driven," Eisinger says. "I don't need any more money. (But) I don't want to sit around doing nothing."

Eisinger is responsible for Bethesda's familiar Air Rights Building on Wisconsin Avenue, an innovative project that was started in the early 1960s and built over an underground tunnel that he constructed for B&O Railroad trains.

Eisinger is also the man attempting to resuscitate the infamous Rockville Mall by carving it up, giving it a new facade and constructing over 300,000 square feet of office and retail space, 11 movie theaters and, eventually, an office tower. His aggressive interest in remaking the mall followed its many years of decline and disuse, during which the mall became an embarrassing eyesore, protruding like the hull of a half-sunken ghost freighter from the downtown streets.

"Roger has always showed some imagination, which is kind of a little novel for developers," says Robert Linowes, co-founder of the powerful Linowes and Blocher zoning law firm, who has known Eisinger for about 35 years.

"I admire his willingness to take new and novel approaches and be a leader," Linowes adds.

Dapper and earnest, Eisinger is eager to talk about his accomplished past and his future plans. Sitting in his large, wood-paneled, but far from ostentatious office on the fourth floor of the Air Rights Building, he talks in an even voice, eschewing flip responses. To illustrate something, he points to Eisinger Kilbane buildings visible from a window or walks over to a scale model.

An active sportsman, Eisinger calls development "as exhilarating as playing games."

Deep Maryland roots

His biographical sketch describes Eisinger as a ninth-generation Marylander. The Rev. James McGill, whose descendants eventually married into the Eisinger clan two generations back, was sent to Ellicott City in 1760 by the bishop of Edinburgh to minister to the colonies.

The duck-shaped tie clip and ivory cufflinks etched with quails that Eisinger wears are trappings of the landed aristocracy of the 1980s. He lives on a 33-acre farm in Potomac, belongs to the Potomac Hunt and Polo clubs and is an avid duck and goose hunter and stamp collector.

Colleagues describe Eisinger as laid-back and easygoing.

Born in Washington, he grew up in Friendship Heights, the older of two brothers. He received a degree in business administration and chemistry from Indiana University, graduating in 1942, the year he also married the former Lois Allison. He says he was pre-med in college, but changed to business in his junior year.

"I didn't think I was smart enough to be a doctor," Eisinger says.

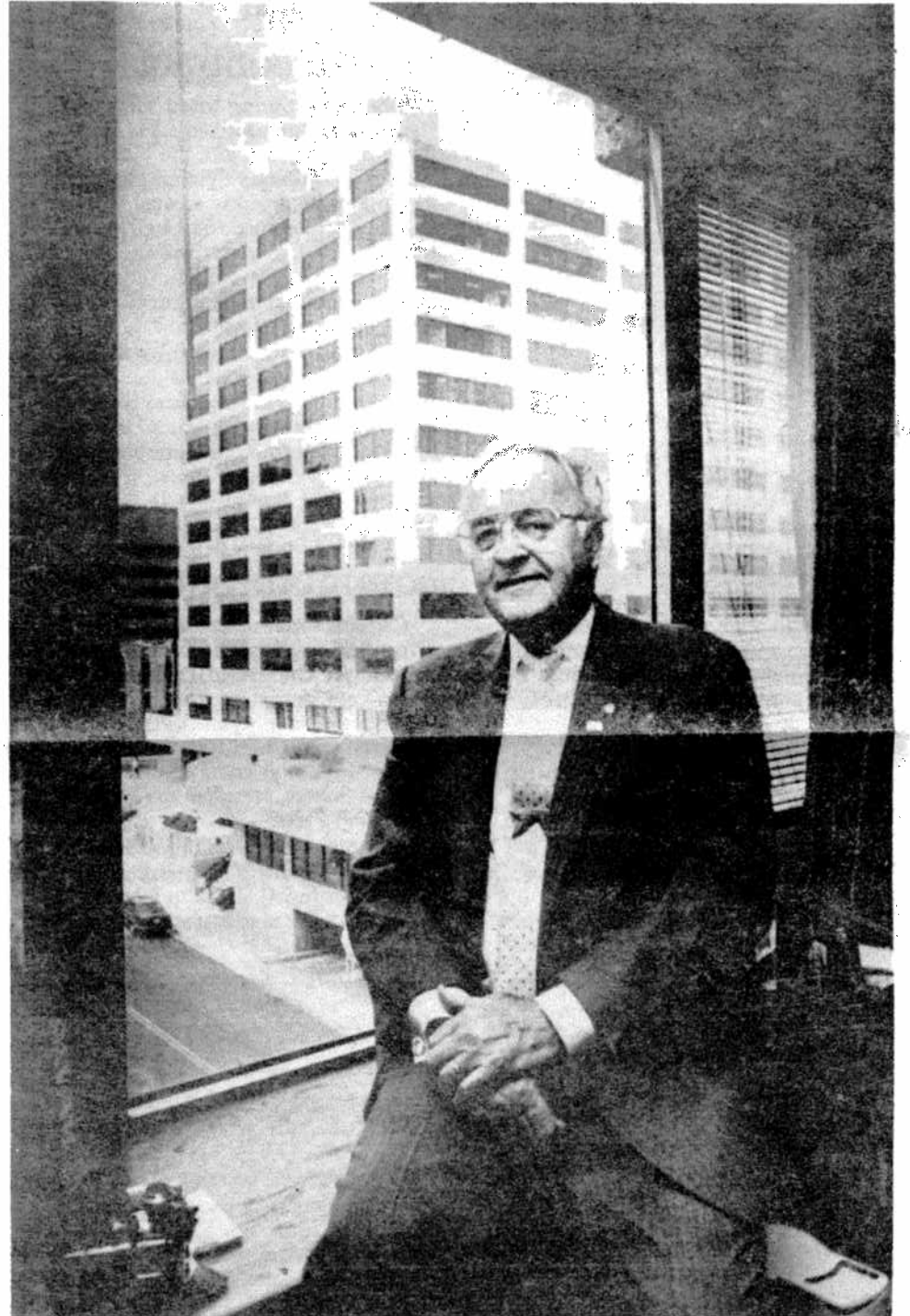
His grandfather had started what became a prosperous lumber and building supply company, which the grandson would use as a jumping-off point for a career in commercial building.

After heading a laundry company in the Army's Quartermaster Corps during World War II at Bougainville in the Northern Solomons, where he received a Battle Star, and also serving in New Caledonia and Guadalcanal, Eisinger returned home to expand the family business with his uncle.

"When you're lying in a foxhole and shells are coming at you — the only thing I thought was, 'If I could have one child to carry on the name,'" he says. (The Eisingers had the first of four children in 1946. Roger Williams Eisinger III, 40, is a senior pilot with US Air; daughter Page Eisinger Buis, 35, is a mother of two young boys. He now has seven grandchildren.)

Roger Eisinger Sr., who ran the Eisinger Mill and Lumber Co., told his son to diversify the business by going into steel, plastics, plywood and cement.

"It worked very well," Eisinger recalls, "but I didn't like the business so I sold
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Roger Eisinger has a view of the North Air Rights Building from his office on the fourth floor of the East Air Rights Building.
Sentinel Staff photo by Deborah Green

Developer Eisinger's eye turns to Rockville, shore

By PETER SCHLOSSMAN
Sentinel Staff Writer

Roger Eisinger is about to start, already constructing or has just completed \$150 million worth of commercial development in Bethesda.

Along with partner John Kilbane, Eisinger's most ambitious undertaking now is a \$94 million "labor of love" — transforming the moribund Rockville Mall into an office, retail and entertainment complex called Rockville Metro Center.

Among Eisinger Kilbane & Associates' more recent Bethesda projects:

■ The Apex Building, 10 movie theaters and 115,000 square feet of office space, will be under construction in December.

■ Hampden Square, 150,000 square feet of offices and 37 deluxe condominiums in two separate towers, is scheduled to open in March 1988.

■ Guest Quarters, a 189-suite hotel, opened earlier this year.

Eisinger Kilbane & Associates, considered the second-largest developer in Bethesda, got the Hampden Square and Guest Quarters projects approved

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Biz Briefs

Kramer cuts ribbon for new Metro Plaza

County Executive Sidney Kramer recently cut the ribbon to open **Silver Spring Metro Plaza**, the largest building complex in the downtown area.

Owned jointly by **McCormick Properties Inc.** and **Caruscan of Maryland Inc.**, it is adjacent to the Silver Spring Metro Station.

The project, made up of three buildings surrounding a central retail mall, features a waterfall and fountains. The buildings contain 725,000 square feet of office space, retail shops and dining facilities.

Silver Spring Metro Plaza is headquarters for CNA Insurance and First American Bank. An underground parking garage can accommodate 600 vehicles.

J. Randall Evans, secretary of Maryland's Department of Economic and Employment Development, attended opening ceremonies along with Dyan Lingle, the county's director of the Office of Economic Development.

"The Silver Spring Metro Plaza makes a very dramatic and clear statement regarding the importance of revitalizing Silver Spring and the county's commitment to a 'first class' downtown," Kramer said.

Stratford School offers new programs

The **Stratford Schools** has received approval from the State Board for Higher Education to offer a combined G.E.D. preparation and office assistant program. This nine-month program combines extensive preparation for high school equivalency with training in skills for a career in the business world.

Another new six-month course being offered is a cooperative education-word processing program.

Eligible students may qualify for financial aid and placement assistance. For more information call the Gaithersburg campus admissions office at 948-4600.

Construction begins on new Marriott

The **Marriott Corporation** recently broke ground for its fifth Courtyard hotel in the Washington area, the second one in the county. The new Courtyard hotel will be located on Prosperity Drive at the intersection of Route 29 and Randolph and Cherry Hill roads in Silver Spring.

The courtyard concept was developed after extensive consumer research into the moderately priced lodging segment and the amenities that those business and pleasure travelers value most, according to Marriott officials.

The project is expected to be completed by fall 1988. Marriott's other county Courtyard is located in Rockville.

Area firms receive contracts

The Silver Spring-based **Vitro Corporation** has received a \$14 million, three-year contract with the Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command to support the recently created **Warfare System Architecture and Engineering Program Directorate**. Vitro will assist in conducting a new process to improve the design, coordination and integration of Navy warfare systems.

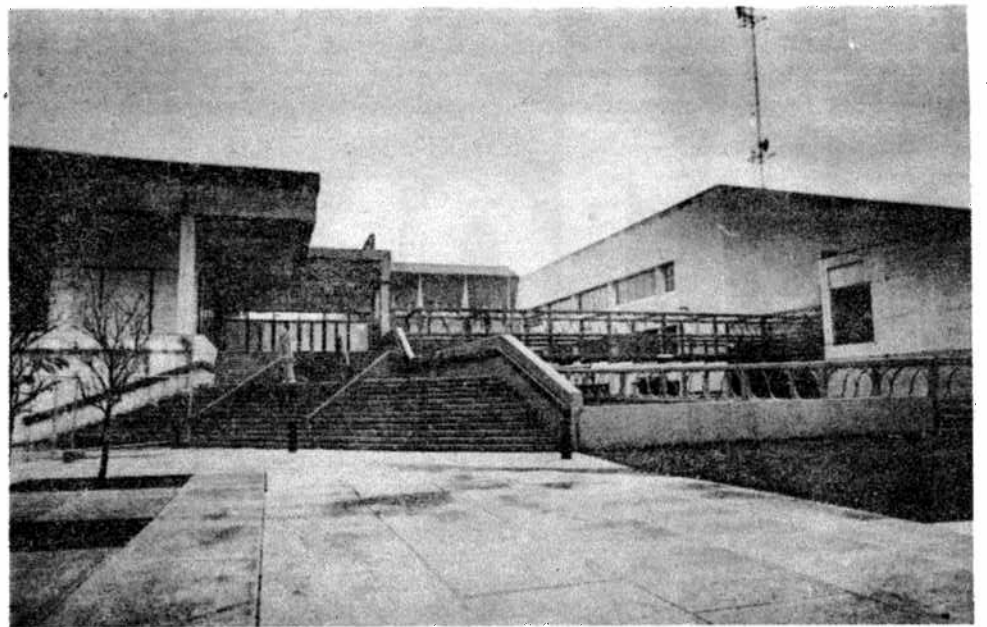
The National Cancer Institute has awarded a five year, \$7 million contract to **Microbiological Associates** in Rockville to test and monitor laboratory rodents to determine the presence of 16 potential indigenous viruses.

Printers joins communications firm

Cadmus Communications, a diversified communications company, will acquire **Garamond/Pridemark Press Inc.**, a commercial printing company in Baltimore, according to **Cadmus** Chairman and Chief Executive Officer **Wallace Stettinius** and Potomac resident **Howard Silvers**, president of **Garamond/Pridemark Press**.

According to Silvers this move will help his company grow stronger and faster and allow Cadmus to increase its presence in the marketplace.

—Phyllis K. Becker



The Rockville Metro Center is entering its second phase — construction of 11 movie theaters and 20,000 square feet of offices. Sentinel Staff photo by Deborah Green

Developer eyes other projects

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during the controversial "beauty contest" among developers in 1984, which led to today's new skyline in downtown Bethesda.

County planners had decided how much new construction they would permit in downtown Bethesda, linking the total to traffic capacity, then allowed developers to submit proposals to fill that construction envelope.

Officials denied a third Eisinger Kilbane project, the 500,000-square-foot Woodmont Air Rights building, the only one of 10 development proposals to be turned down in the beauty contest.

"It was too much to come on the market at one time," Eisinger says in retrospect. "I'm very pleased we weren't successful."

Further up Wisconsin Avenue, Eisinger's Rockville Metro Center is entering its second phase — construction of 11 movie theaters and 20,000 square feet of offices.

About 90 percent of 150,000 square feet of office and retail space already constructed in the project's first phase is now leased, according to his son, Renny Eisinger.

Rockville City Manager Richard V. Robinson says he hopes the project, springing from the all-but-abandoned carcass of the old Rockville Mall, will provide the needed impetus to successfully revitalizing the Town Center, which he calls a "ghost town after 6 p.m."

The third phase of Rockville Metro Center, an eight-story office tower, is slated for the summer of 1988. The fourth and final phase, still on the drawing boards, is 70,000 square feet of offices and condominiums. Plans are expected to be submitted to the city by mid-1988.

Eisinger's past projects in the city included the Southlawn Office and Industrial Center, 150 acres of industrial buildings.

"It is critical to the Town Center that the mall be a success. I believe Eisinger Kilbane & Associates, and Eisinger in particular, has devoted a lot of time and energy to making it successful," Robinson says.

"The project is about 15 times larger than I anticipated," Eisinger says, and won't make much money "for a long number of years." He adds: "This is more a labor of love. Unfortunately, we've had to put so much cash into it. (But) we feel there is a tremendous future."

Another son, Robert O. Eisinger, 36, heads the Eisinger Development Group, of which his father is a partner, and is in charge of longrange plans for an airport north of Germantown in Clarksburg.

The company has assembled 2,000 acres that it hopes to transform into a business park with a nearby airport for corporate jets. The County Council

would have to approve a master plan amendment to allow the airpark.

Among other recent projects, Eisinger is a partner in an ambitious restoration project in Stevensville, the Kent Island town on the Chesapeake Bay. The effort includes renovating 11 Victorian houses into street-level boutiques and second-floor apartments and construction of new office space and homes.

Eisinger says the \$5 million project, including 20,000 square feet of retail space and 15,000 square feet of offices, will be completed in 18 months.

Eisinger also remodeled a 159-room Sheraton Hotel in Salisbury. The \$6 million project opened in July. He completed a similar hotel renovation project in Philadelphia.

"I have fun doing what I'm doing. I enjoy it," Eisinger says. "I like the fact I can create things other people wouldn't touch, like the Rockville Metro Center, Stevensville and the Salisbury Sheraton."

"I like to be able to do things other people can't, and create a better environment for the community."

IBM, Marriott cited for hiring disabled

Two companies, IBM and Marriott Corp., are the recipients of new county awards recognizing efforts to employ the handicapped.

County Executive Sidney Kramer presented the first Pyramid Awards during a recent ceremony at the Executive Office Building in Rockville.

Kramer said Marriott has hired approximately 6,000 mentally and physically disabled persons nationwide and about 450 in the metropolitan area.

County officials said Marriott provides paid, on-the-job training using job coaches provided by rehabilitation agencies. The company also has programs to recruit handicapped workers and to train managers in identifying, hiring and supervising the disabled.

IBM employs approximately 7,000 disabled workers, including many in Montgomery County, Kramer said.

IBM facilities here include ramps, modified restrooms, talking terminals for the visually impaired and portable phonic devices for use in conference rooms by hearing-impaired employees. The computer giant also has a management training program.

The Pyramid Award, made of clear lucite, symbolizes how organizations can focus energy to help disabled people become self-reliant, Kramer said. The award was designed by Rita Magee, a county employee.

Test videotape cameras before you purchase one

Just as eight millimeter film cameras often recorded the childhood years of the post-World War II baby boom generation, new videotape cameras are being used in increasing numbers by today's baby boomers to record their offspring.

In many ways video cameras, par-

Consumer Tips

Particularly the new compact camcorders, represent a significant improvement over 8 mm film cameras.

For example, an hour-long movie made on the old system might require the processing and splicing together of 20 three-minute segments, a costly proposition. With videotape there is no processing and no splicing.

The downside of videotape cameras is that the initial purchase price is significantly higher than an 8 mm film system. So, consumers are urged to carefully consider whether they would actually use a video camera. Consider renting one or borrowing one before buying.

The first video cameras came with several components: a camera, a re-

recorder and a battery pack. These systems were cumbersome compared to today's newer camcorders, which contain these components in one compact unit.

Camcorders record on one of three non-interchangeable types of videotape: VHS, Beta or 8 mm. If you already own a VHS or Beta video cassette recorder, you might find it more practical to buy a compatible camera system.

Your choice will include either a standard-size camcorder or one of the smaller compact camcorders. The primary disadvantage of the very compact camcorders is that they don't record as long as the standard camcorder.

Eight millimeter video cameras are a new alternative to VHS or Beta. While not compatible with either Beta or VHS, an 8 mm camera can be plugged directly into your TV. The 8 mm system is presently the smallest video-camera system available.

In any case, you should test several models before purchasing, and be sure to ask friends familiar with video cameras for their recommendations.

Consumer tips are from the **Better Business Bureau**. Call the Rockville office at 468-3405 for more information.

Eisinger still transforming Bethesda, Rockville skylines

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the property (in 1958) and went into development."

For the next three years, he built 15 luxury houses in Potomac and Bethesda that now sell for about \$400,000. But he gave it up and started commercial building because he "didn't make money selling houses," he says.

"It was just a tough, tough business. I didn't have the right people."

That changed in 1961, when Eisinger joined forces with John K. Kilbane to form the commercial real estate firm of Eisinger Kilbane & Associates.

"I create the ventures, John and I finance them, he leases them," is how Eisinger describes their long partnership.

Their first project was an 11-story, 70,000-square-foot building constructed in Bethesda that year and leased to Documentation Inc., which kept track of information for the National Cancer Institute. The Documentation building was the first in the county to contain an underground parking lot.

The Bethesda boom

John J. Matthews, the Planning Board's chief of community planning for the southern part of the county, says Eisinger "always thought big and was kind of out ahead of the public agencies."

Eisinger not only was "forward looking," Matthews says, he was accommodating in readily accepting the new wave of planning requirements for amenities such as sidewalks and interior malls.

"I've personally had no problems with him," says civic activist Helen Blunt, past president of the Bethesda Coalition. But Blunt adds that she's "not too thrilled" with Eisinger's plans for 10 movie theaters in a new building in downtown Bethesda, saying parking is already a problem.

Rosemary Berger, a recent president of the Edgemoor Citizens Association, is less charitable.

"I do not consider Mr. Eisinger to be a great public benefactor," Berger says. "I don't see anything wonderful about him."

Berger was a leading foe of Eisinger's Apex Building, arguing that the pending office project will bring too much traffic to neighborhood streets. She concedes, however, that Eisinger "agreed not to oppose any traffic restriction we would want to place on our streets," such as turning them into one-way streets during rush hour.

And she blames the County Council, not Eisinger, for too much development in Bethesda.

"He was permitted to do what he did — it wasn't his fault. I don't blame him for wanting to develop his land."

Eisinger — who takes credit for first christening the area between Rockville and Bethesda as North Bethesda ("Bethesda in those days had a better name than Rockville") — was right on top of Bethesda's building boom in the mid-'60s.

He set his sights on upper Wisconsin Avenue. Now some of the most lucrative and congested real estate in the Washington metropolitan area, the land was covered with one- and two-story buildings. Typically, a retail establishment occupied the first floor, with offices or apartments above.

Couldn't get a loan

Downtown Bethesda's recent and controversial renaissance has its roots, in a way, with Eisinger's relatively visionary Air Rights building in 1964. He has since constructed two additions — the Air Rights West and North buildings, both

143-foot-tall office towers started in 1969 and 1979, respectively.

"The original Air Rights (building), you see, was built on ground we didn't own. . . . We waited 12 years before we started building," he says, after securing the "air rights" from the B & O Railroad in 1952.

Except for in New York and some other big cities, Eisinger says, the concept of purchasing the air rights to build on top of an existing use was novel at the time. And his 110-foot-tall office project was the first such attempt to build without having committed tenants in advance.

"As a result, we couldn't get anybody to lend us any money on it."

Eventually, a New York investor gave Eisinger a loan after the building was out of the ground. But it took two years to lease what he calls "the first major building in town."

Getting tenants proved almost as difficult.

"It was not an easy job," he recalls. "They just weren't used to the suburbs. Everybody was downtown."

Eisinger recalls luring one of his first tenants, John Stoy of the accounting firm of Stoy, Mallone and Co., out to the Air Rights Building.

"I had to make them understand they could survive coming out here. I went to Stoy's office and I said, 'John, let's put a stopwatch on the time it takes you to get up from your desk, get your car and get on the road home and then get off.' And he lived over here in Westmoreland Hills.

"And we did that. It took him a long time to get the elevator that day. . . . Luckily, it took a long time to get his car. And then when we got home, I'd forgotten to time him.

"But he said, 'I'd no idea it took me that long to get down there and into the office.' And I got him to move out here on that basis."

Eisinger's gamble paid off as Bethesda became a convenient alternative to the congestion and skyrocketing real estate prices in Washington.

"A lot of people felt they had to be downtown. . . . Their customers were all expecting them to be downtown. Gradually, we made them understand their customers would rather have them out here, because it was easier to get to."

And soon, of course, Bethesda became a downtown in its own right.

Eisinger now has an easier time securing loans for projects. Robert R. Furman, owner of Furman Builders which constructed the first Air Rights Building, describes Eisinger's success. "He's an extremely personable guy. He has a great retinue of lenders . . . (and) has a great track record. He also makes personal friends of (the lenders) inviting them . . . to go hunting."

Quality, not quantity

Renny Eisinger says his father taught him "you gotta be honest, hard working, (and) don't ever expect someone to give you something for nothing."

As a child, he recalls, "I always looked up to him. I didn't see him a lot. He'd be at work before we were up and back after we were asleep."

Renny remembers that a family vacation, a typical outing with four kids piled into the back of the car on a drive down to Ft. Lauderdale. His father had to fly back home for business immediately after the two days spent on the road getting there.

Eisinger's few outside activities include sitting on a steering committee for the Treatment Centers for Disabled Children and Adults Inc., of Rockville, where



'I don't need any more money... (but) I don't want to sit around doing nothing,' Roger Eisinger says.

Sentinel Staff photo by Deborah Green

over the last three years he has helped raise \$2 million of a \$4 million goal to build a new complex in Shady Grove.

Eisinger says he is more interested in the challenge and quality of a development project than its size. Today, he says he is proudest of the original Air Rights development and the company's ongoing redevelopment of the old Rockville Mall — "turning around," as he puts it, a property that "had a history of being a lemon."

While Eisinger says he doesn't have any future plans in Bethesda, the company is "very much interested in hotels, particularly all-suite hotels" such as its plush new Guest Quarters hotel across from Air Rights North.

By now, leading the development trends is the established way Eisinger does business. It's just a little more complicated than in the old days, a comparatively uncontrolled, golden period that he

looks back on fondly.

"Back in 1960, in order to get a building built in Montgomery County, you needed to take a site plan and a small drawing of what you wanted to build and you went in to see Mrs. Morrison in the License and Inspection Department.

"And you said, 'Mrs. Morrison, I want to build this building on that site.' And she'd say, 'OK, sign this piece of paper here and give me \$25 and you've got yourself a permit.'

"That would take about half an hour.

"Then I would go down and see the bank and I'd say, 'I want to build this building on that piece of property and I need \$50,000.' And the bank would say, 'Fine, go see the loan department and they'll approve a \$50,000 loan.'

"In the meantime, I've already told the contractor to start construction. And that's how it was in those days."