

Land planner part of **Sarasota's** transformation

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Joel Freedman arrived in Sarasota in 1983 with an extensive urban planning background but without work or even a place to live.

Within 24 hours, he had landed both. The work came from college friend and architect Bill Lindner, who had a project requiring planning expertise.

Freedman moved in across the street from Lindner's office, after he noticed a man hammering a "for rent" sign into the ground.

In the 22 years since Freedman arrived from Idaho and began his own land planning consulting firm, he's been a vital component of many of the developments that have transformed the city.

Freedman's resume includes the Whole Foods Market Centre, the 17-story Beau Ciel condo tower, the Broadway Promenade mixed-use project on North Tamiami Trail, and Courthouse Center, a nine-story mix of residences, retail and office at U.S. 301 and Main Street.

He's also been involved with the \$110 million Orchid Beach Club condos under construction on Lido Beach, the Hollywood 20 movie theaters, and the renovation of the Gulf Gate Mall into Sarasota Pavilion.

Freedman attributes his lengthy career to "integrity and respect" gained over the years from government officials and developers alike.

"I try to create a good balance between what the client needs and wants and what the community needs and is willing to give," said Freedman, 52, who works out of a small, nondescript office on Second Street.

As part of his work, Freedman keeps abreast of local and regional government requirements and makes presentations to neighborhood groups.

Freedman's clients say his work is superlative.

"Of all the professionals in any field in this entire city, he's the finest," said Dr. Mark Kauffman, who retained Freedman to work on the Main Plaza, Links Plaza and Courthouse Center developments downtown.

"He's respected, responsive, reliable and reasonable," Kauffman added.

"People trust him," said Charles Githler, who hired Freedman to help expand the Hyatt Hotel's ballroom. "And he always keeps his cool. He's very professional."

Away from planning, Freedman has been involved with arts and civic and nonprofit groups as well.

Two years after coming to Sarasota, after a stint running the City of Boise's bus system, Freedman joined the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce to network.

In 1996, he was elected chairman of the business group's board, where he served through 1998.

During the same time period, Freedman was president of the Sarasota Ballet. He served on its board until 2000.

He also was appointed, in 1994, to become a member of the state's Correctional Privatization Commission, a group he worked with through 2002.

"I'm a big believer in the idea that you need to give back to your community," Freedman said. "And I don't know, maybe it's something about me that I just can't say no."

But if his career plans hold, Freedman may likely be saying no to at least some prospective clients in the future.

Instead of planning, he intends to focus on his own development projects.

Freedman's first project will be the 95-room Hotel Indigo, a four-story lodging property InterContinental is building.

When the hotel opens next year, Freedman will hold a small equity stake. Hotel Indigo's other owners will be Ringling Square developer Doug Tibbetts and Wesley Hospitality.

Other projects may follow, but Freedman knows he likely won't completely shed his planning business.

"The county is becoming more urbanized, and as a result, there will be more of the kind of projects I specialize in," Freedman said. "I think the market here will remain strong the next couple of years."

Still, Freedman says there is a downside to the current development boom.

"Being so busy means I can't fish as much as I want to."