

## Obstacles come with the job for developer

*Copyright New York Times Company Nov 21, 2005*

John Simon worked his way through college starting as an office boy for an engineering and planning firm.

Within nine years -- and without ever earning a college degree -- he had worked his way up to senior transportation consultant.

Simon parlayed that experience to become the senior vice president in charge of all development at one of the nation's largest shopping mall builders.

He'll need that combination of work ethic and development savvy to bring his latest venture to fruition, though.

Pineapple Square, which Simon plans to develop in concert with Isaac Property Co. of Bryan, Ohio, would contain 210 condos in a pair of high-rises, some 40 stores and restaurants and more than 1,000 parking spaces.

Bounded by Lemon and Pineapple avenues and State Street in downtown Sarasota, the project could forever transform the city's quaint downtown into an urban destination.

The city commissioners will decide next month whether to embrace the Pineapple Square proposal. If approved, construction would begin in phases early next year, and wrap up in 2009.

But the endorsement isn't at all guaranteed.

For Simon, obstacles come with the job.

"I really enjoy challenges," said Simon, 58, the chief executive of Isaac Group Holdings LLC, a partnership formed to develop Pineapple Square.

It's a feeling he knows well, having spent nearly three decades at the Taubman Cos. Inc., a Michigan company that is among the nation's biggest retail mall developers.

There, Simon rose from one of two dozen employees on a planning and design team to become senior vice president of development, overseeing construction, store planning, development and market research. In that capacity, he was one of Taubman's top five executives.

Along the way, he oversaw malls like International Plaza in Tampa; Dolphin Mall in Miami; MacArthur Center in Norfolk, Va.; and Cherry Creek Mall in Denver.

Each project presented its own special problems and obstacles.

Simon left the company in December, in the aftermath of an unsuccessful hostile takeover and a corporate reorganization. He joined Isaac in January.

He knows Sarasota might mirror his experience in other cities.

As part of the Pineapple Square plan, Simon and Isaac are asking the city to commit an acre of publicly owned land to the estimated \$150 million project, close a portion of State Street and contribute roughly \$9 million for municipal parking.

Without the city contribution, Pineapple Square won't become a reality, Simon said.

Current and former partners believe that if anyone can overcome the challenges facing Pineapple Square, it's Simon.

"He's enormously capable in every aspect of the development business," said Bob Taubman, Taubman Cos.' chairman, president and chief executive.

"He has good business instincts, good judgment. He listens and he connects with people. He has all the necessary skill sets."

Isaac officials are even more positive.

"I don't know anyone who knows more about development than John, hands down and far and away," said Charles "Butch" Isaac, the Isaac Cos.' president.

For his part, Simon believes Pineapple Square could have the same transforming effect on **Sarasota's downtown** as Taubman malls have throughout the country.

"I've gotten a lot of satisfaction from knowing I had a hand in moving forward the direction of many cities."