SHOPPING FOR THE FUTURE OF RETAIL IN LANCASTER COUNTY

Q&A with Robert Gorland

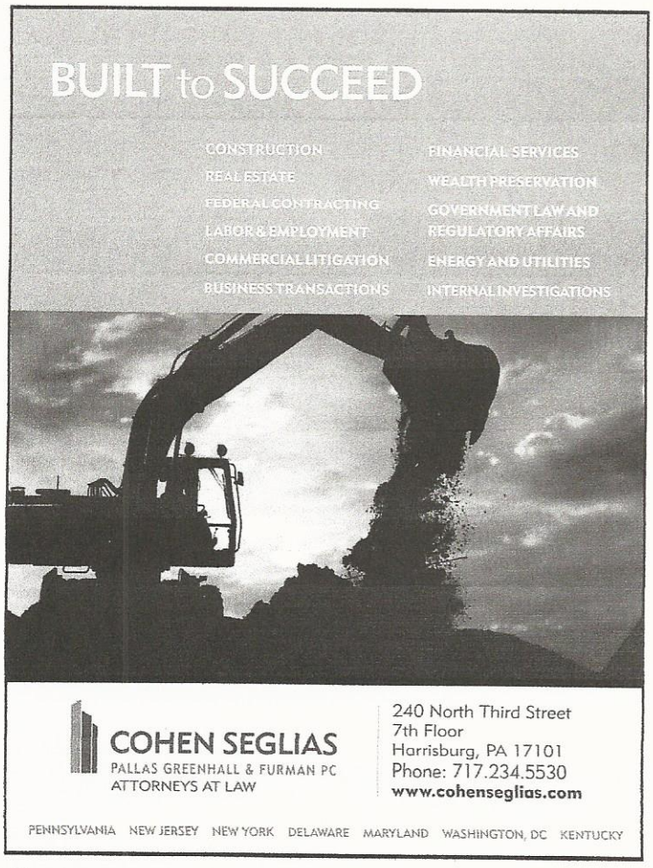
BY ADRIENNE MAURO

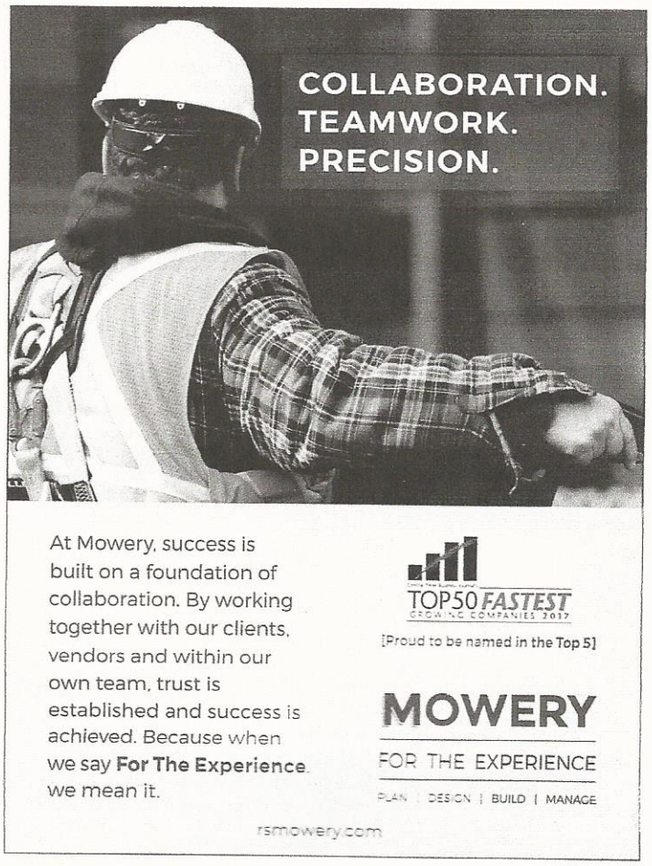
You can get everything online — that's not a new development. You can get your clothes, groceries, everyday necessities and more delivered right to your doorstep with the click of a button.

However, there is some vibrant retail development in Lancaster. Tanger Outlets' Lancaster location is gaining 25 new stores. Major commercial construction projects include The Shoppes at Belmont, with a proposed 370,000-square-foot shopping center with a Whole Foods; Crossings at Conestoga Creek, boasting a new Wegmans; and Lime Spring Square, with its first set of retail stores scheduled to open before the end of 2017.

As brick-and-mortar retail contracts and storefronts shutter, how is it — comparatively — thriving in Lancaster? How does a city stave off retail death in the digital age?

The answer is a mixture of market research, attractive demographics and coincidental timing, Robert Gorland explains. Gorland is vice president at Matthew P. Casey and Associates in Lower Paxton Township, which specializes in retail and supermarket feasibility studies.





CPBJ: With sales moving to the internet, how is Lancaster County able to build physical stores?

Robert Gorland: Lancaster boasts a great regional draw with well-known outlets, a large regional employment base and a growing daytime population — that's people who work in Lancaster, but live outside of the county. It's also close to York County, which has its own burgeoning employment base. The two counties have a combined population of nearly 1 million.

CPBJ: Where is the demand for this development coming from?

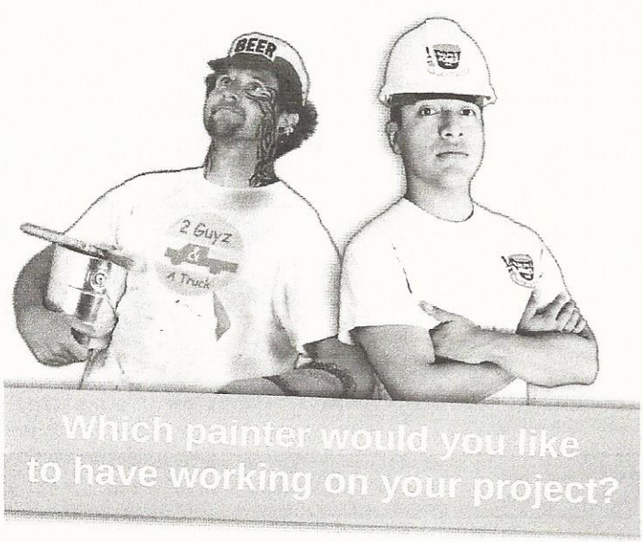
RG: The heart of any store coming to a region stems from market research. They're looking at how much competition is there, population size and the demographic slice. The new commercial properties are all on or near major highways. The ease of transportation creates less resistance for shoppers, but also allows companies to tap into existing facility distribution and operations networks. It fits their strategic real estate sites. This is important for a company when considering new locations. Stores may also consider local demand. In the case of Whole Foods, social media and public opinion may have led to the construction of the first Whole Foods in Central Pennsylvania. But social media is only a small portion of what causes stores to choose a location.

CPBJ: Why are three major commercial properties coming to and growing in the Lancaster area all at the same time?

RG: It might just be a case of coincidence. Lots of things have been in the works for several years. And they're all coming to fruition now. With certain retailers experiencing financial problems and closing their doors, Lancaster provides an attractive enough demographic for new retailers to cash in on the loss of their predecessors.

CPBJ: What should we expect to see as retail pivots to keep up with the current online climate?

RG: For one, it's likely that companies will only have one store per county, instead of peppering the region with their shops. Brands want their name out there, but don't want to cannibalize sales. The actual stores are also likely to change. Large retailers have been very mindfully slowing their development and building smaller stores. Retailers build prototype stores that can sell almost the same volume as a large store with reduced occupancy cost. Bigger is not always better in brick and mortar. •



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