



Five-Star Senior Living

As Detroit and its suburbs rebuild following the city's bankruptcy, developer **Beztak Properties** is bringing in senior-living communities with a different ideal in mind than any of their competitors: a luxury lifestyle

BY MARY KENNEY

THE HEAVY MACHINERY ROLLED AWAY—bulldozers and trucks and loaders—and all that was left of a former funeral parlor was an empty lot of hard-packed dirt. But, this wasn't an ending; it was a beginning, one new project of many happening throughout Birmingham, Michigan. Jana Ecker, the city's planning director, told *Crain's Detroit Business* that she hasn't seen this much development happening in her area since before the recession, and Beztak Properties is one of

the developers making it happen.

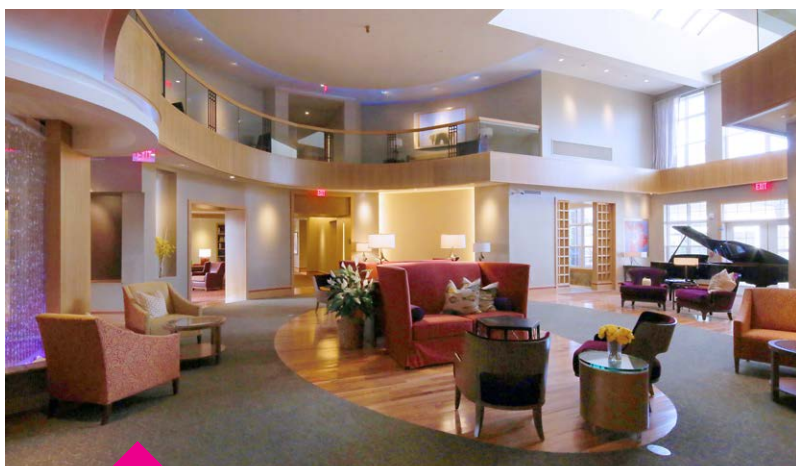
"Birmingham is one of the premier areas in Metro Detroit," Beztak CEO Sam Beznos says. "It has always been appealing for residential and commercial uses and has always carried a premium because of its energy, lifestyle, and very quaint and attractive downtown."

Birmingham's active community, complete with restaurants, a theater, a library, and vibrant culture, drew Beznos and his company to the area. Beznos wanted to build a high-end senior-living community, All Seasons of Birmingham. He had previously developed an All Seasons senior-living facility in West Bloomfield, Michigan, so he had a good idea of what he wanted in Birmingham.

The site of the former funeral parlor, where Beznos plans to build, is located just two blocks from downtown—close enough to be within walking distance but far enough away to have a peaceful, residential setting.

Beznos has several developments in the Detroit area, as well as additional projects in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona; Naples and Miami, Florida; and Washington, DC. The Motor City filed for bankruptcy in 2013, and though its finances and markets have seen a small upswing in recent months, it has been suffering serious urban blight since before the recession. But this environment hasn't deterred Beznos; if anything, it has brought the counties around the metro area into his focus.

▲ The All Seasons Birmingham will have 131 senior-living units with access to a common room, a rooftop terrace and lounge, a theater, a full gym, a lecture hall, a bistro bar, a hair salon, and a chef-managed dining hall.



ALL SEASONS WEST BLOOMFIELD

"The site of All Seasons West Bloomfield formerly contained a WhirlyBall court and ice rink. We were interested in acquiring this property because it was immediately adjacent to one of our premier apartment communities, Aldingbrooke," Beznos explains. "What's interesting about Aldingbrooke is that many residents who have lived there since we first opened are now reaching the age and need for additional services. There was a void in the West Bloomfield area for a high-end, independent senior-living community. Seniors who resided in their homes or condos had no good local options but hesitated to leave the area because it had so much to offer. It took us several years to get all of the approvals, and we had to create a new zoning code to allow for our development. I think we opened at a great time, and people jumped at the opportunity to move into our project."



CHURCH-TURNED-HOTEL

"The Washington, DC, hotel is a very special project," Beznos says. "My local partner and very dear friend asked me to participate to acquire and redevelop a historic, 100-plus-year-old Christian Scientist church as a residential building. We eventually were awarded the project but got held up with historic preservation. We acquired the adjacent building and brainstormed a boutique hotel to be housed in the new building—with the church as a restaurant, banquet facility, bar, and lounge that would be connected to the hotel. Six years later, the hotel was all approved, and major construction will begin this fall."

"The fall of Detroit has had a lot of national impact in this market and has helped keep the national players out of this area, which has, frankly, helped us," Beznos says. "Now that Detroit, and the state in general, are improving, we are seeing more and more new companies come to Michigan."

Birmingham and West Bloomfield, both affluent areas, were somewhat isolated from the economic slump experienced by the rest of their state during the recession. And now, as their nearest major city gets back on its feet, Beztak has positioned itself to become one of the area's major real estate developers.

The big picture hasn't distracted Beznos from his more focused vision of what All Seasons will bring to Birmingham, though. He hopes that the high-end senior-living facility, which will include many different styles of units, will allow seniors to remain active and participate in Birmingham's vivid culture. The All Seasons will feature a common room oasis with a seamless glass wall, a rooftop terrace and sky lounge overlooking downtown Birmingham, a theater, a full gym, a lecture hall, a bistro bar, a full-service hair salon, and a dining hall managed by a chef. There will be 131 housing units available (88 of which have already been reserved), and eight of them will be live-work apartments with street-level access so that residents can operate small businesses from their homes.

Beznos sees many untapped opportunities in the senior-housing market, and he has prepped Beztak to make a significant break into the industry. Many companies ignore what seniors are looking for, he says, leaving the market underserved. Rather than creating an institutional space with the antiseptic feel of a hospital, All Seasons is designed like a five-star hotel. ■

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