



THURSDAY 09.04.14

your money



MARY FRANK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
A retail shopping center with two to four tenants is under construction at 89 Newman Springs Road in Shrewsbury.

Shopping center replaces bowling alley in Shrewsbury



Anthony Panissidi

WHAT'S GOING THERE?

SHREWSBURY — A vacated piece of land appears close to rebirth more than five years after a fire destroyed the bowling alley that previously occupied the area at 89 Newman Springs Road near Route 35 in the borough.

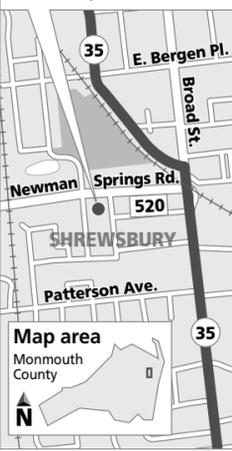
The frame of a new shopping center already rises above the fenced-off construction site next to La Rosa's Pastry Shop & Cafe, where Memory Lanes bowling alley sat until 2009. Construction began last April with an opening date slated for next spring, according to Metrovation, the Red Bank-based developer, which promotes itself as offering unique real estate projects in California, New Jersey and Washington.

The planned single-story shopping center will offer 9,000 square feet for two to four tenants depending on size requirements. While Metrovation remains in negotiations with several prospective tenants, the privately-held company seeks general retail stores, offices and restaurants to fill the shopping center, according to its website.

"It's very positive for Shrewsbury and the whole area here, Red Bank ... and actually going into Fair Haven, because it is the corridor off 109 on the Garden State (Parkway)," Mayor Donald Burden said. "It's the major corridor into the Shore area here. It's nice to see sort of a blighted area revitalized and certainly we welcome the tax base that it'll bring to the community. It also will complement the other properties that Metrovation has here in Shrewsbury."

Some of Metrovation's other properties in the area include The Grove at Shrewsbury and The Grove West, both major shopping centers that sit on opposite sides of Route 35 in Shrewsbury, and the

Real estate rebirth
A planned shopping center will sit on the former site of a bowling alley destroyed by a fire in June 2009 in Shrewsbury.



Staff graphic

West Side Lofts, a five-story commercial and residential building under construction on Bridge Avenue off West Front Street in Red Bank.

As for the shopping center's potential effects on the often congested intersection at Newman Springs Road and Route 35, Burden does not see much of a cause for concern.

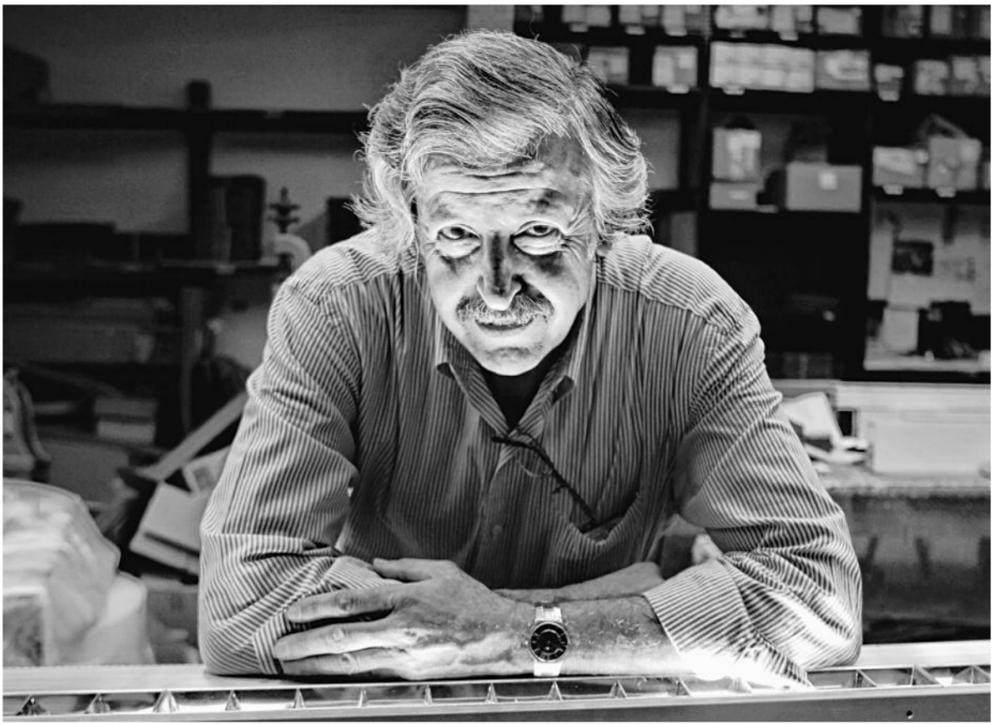
"It'll be marginal because of the intended nature of the tenants in that property, so I don't see that it's going to be any major impact in terms of traffic," he said.

Metrovation declined to reveal the shopping center's cost of construction.

Have you seen a construction project in Monmouth or Ocean counties and wanted to know what was going there? Contact staff writer Anthony Panissidi at 732-643-4284 or apanissidi@app.com, and he will look into it for a future column. For previous stories, visit APP.com/whatsthere.

LETTING THERE BE LIGHT

Ocean Township company works on high-end lighting projects, unique fixtures



MARY FRANK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Ben Salomon started Specialty Lighting Industries in Ocean Township over 20 years ago.

By Susan Bloom Correspondent

Even as a young boy, Ben Salomon loved to tinker with objects to improve their design and functionality.

An inquisitive student who redesigned a lamp at age 8, built his first radio the following year, and later graduated with a degree in engineering. "I was always inventing and creating things since I was 7 years old," the 60-year-old resident of the Elberon section of Long Branch said. "My vision is, if somebody wants something, it has to be done and there has to be a way to create it."

With Specialty Lighting Industries, the family-owned architectural lighting fixture company in Ocean Township that he founded in 1993, Salomon channeled his passion and vision on the lighting industry, where he's brought art, glamor and exacting precision to an often under-the-radar field.

His fascination with lighting began 15 years earlier, when he started out as an electrical contractor who subcontracted for larger lighting manufacturers, eventually getting hands-on experience running two small lighting businesses before SLI.

"Lighting has to be done right — it's not just about putting a light bulb in the center of the room," he explained. "At SLI, we create a state-of-the-art experience."

Family operation

At the company's 19,000-square-foot facility, which employs 35 people — including Salomon's wife, Rachel, who handles inside sales; daughter Lyat, who manages accounting; son Awi, the general manager; and youngest son David, who oversees the company's suppliers and inventory — "we design and manufacture a broad range of architectural lighting fixtures for commercial and residential applications such as wall washing/grazing, accent lighting and picture lighting," said Awi Salomon, 34. "Our products are adjustable and project a clean look that blends in with the existing architecture, as if the room was built around the lights."

Selling primarily to two different types of clients — lighting designers/architects who design lighting layouts and specify products for a project and the electrical distributors through whom commercial, residential, or retail customers must buy their products, as they don't sell direct — "we have hundreds of different products and deal with thousands of customers all over the world," Awi Salomon said.

While half of the company's business involves sales to high-end private residences (including many celebrity homeowners), SLI's product has been installed in a broad range of renowned commercial locations as well, including New York City's World Financial Center, AT&T Stadium (home of the Dallas Cowboys), the Holocaust Museum in Washington, flagship stores for Prada and Gucci and New Jersey's iconic Hess Building in Woodbridge.

"We're about making things user friendly and easy for homeowners or commercial users to manage, as they'll be working with the product long after the electrician has left," Awi said. In addition to being among the first in the industry to offer families

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BEN SALOMON, founder of Specialty Lighting Industries

of architectural products comprising matching pieces, Awi said that the company's high-end optics, which avoid glare through the use of proprietary and patented glass or acrylic lenses rather than the reflectors often used by other manufacturers, represent another of SLI's signature features.

"Our products are often developed through conversations with designers based on their needs because we want the end user to be happy," Awi Salomon said.



MARY FRANK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Jim McMillan of Asbury Park, a machine shop manager at Specialty Lighting Industries, loads a fixture for trimming into a machine in the computer numerical control shop.

SPECIALTY LIGHTING INDUSTRIES

Location: 1306 Doris Avenue, Ocean Township

Phone: 732-517-0800

Website: www.specialtylightingindustries.com

Founded: 1993

Owners: Ben Salomon and family

Customized products

In that respect, SLI's signature has become its ability to customize products to any specification, a task that many larger lighting companies either won't or aren't financially positioned to undertake. "We don't offer modular pieces, but rather cut our linear fixtures to custom sizes, which we consider our 'standard' because we do it every day using precision lathes, machines that extrude metal or aluminum, and other highly-specialized pieces of equipment," Awi Salomon said. "It's easy to be the big guy and sell standard products off the shelf, but we offer something different here — special attention, a custom approach, and pride in our customer relationships. We're also known as being innovators in the industry and have numerous patents in process for new fixture designs we've invented," he said.

"Thanks to their great design team and successful manner of execution, SLI offers high-quality, specification-grade fixtures and we work with and purchase products from them several times a month," said Gordon Jamieson, a former Howell resident who owns full-service electrical distributor Midway Electric in the Bronx. "Because they're a smaller firm, they're more flexible and have the ability to design and work around homeowners' and designers' wishes. They're a great group that works together well and they truly represent a hardworking local manufacturer and strong business in Ocean Township," he said.

Awi Salomon said today's fast-moving lighting industry presents many challenges. Consumers demand more compact, angular and unobtrusive fixtures, and the growing conversion from incandescent, halogen and fluorescent light sources to LED technology "require more precise engineering than ever," he said.

But working with his family remains a labor of love. "I've been here for 10 years now and I love it. Every day is different and you never know what's going to happen. We all wear a lot of hats in our family business and are always keeping our pencil to paper and trying to sharpen it," he said. "Ultimately, our goal is to build the best product for the best price and make sure our customers are happy and get what they're paying for, whatever it takes."

Of the venture he created over 20 years ago, "the business has gone onto the next generation and hopefully my grandchildren will take it over someday," Ben Salomon said. But for this master craftsman, who sees everyone at SLI as part of his family, the past and the future have never been more certain.

"I love lighting because light is life, and Specialty Lighting Industries means everything to me — it's my life and my passion," he said. "I care about every little thing here, and my customers see that, too."