

FACE TO FACE WITH...

Mike Morgan

Owner | The Morgan Group Inc.

Mike Morgan feels like a kid again.

The local apartment developer recently gained 100 percent control of The Morgan Group Inc., and with that shift has come a new sense of entrepreneurial enthusiasm for the executive, who typically operates under the radar and does not grant many interviews. His picture isn't even on the company's website.

Morgan bought out brother Ronnie Morgan's 50 percent interest in the 24-year-old company in March in an amicable parting of ways. The brothers had sold many of their properties a few years ago, so they had a chance to reprioritize when the downturn hit. Ronnie decided to be an investor, and Mike wanted to operate the business.

Mike Morgan, already chairman of the company, took over the president's role in January when former president, Alan Patton, joined Hines.

Now calling the shots, Morgan created a new apartment brand known as Pearl, which is associated with his first two solo projects, designed by Jim Wallace with Houston-based Wallace Garcia Wilson Architects Inc. Morgan broke ground last month on Pearl Greenway, a 341-unit apartment complex at 3788 Richmond, former site of the Central Presbyterian Church. JP Morgan Chase provided the

construction loan for the project, which will be finished in December 2012.

The company also recently bought a block bounded by Rosalie, Smith, Elgin and Louisiana for a 147-unit complex called Pearl Midtown. Construction has not begun, but completion is set for 2013.

The seemingly liberated Morgan told *HBJ* reporter Jennifer Dawson he enjoys his new-found flexibility at the company, which he refers to internally as "Morgan 2.0." The executive has turned part of his office into a game room, complete with a big-screen TV and an old-school video game called Big Buck World that he likes to play with employees while they chat about work.

How have you been affected by the changes at your company?

It's been so positive now that I'm back; fully engaged. I feel like a kid again. These changes have put me back on the front line, and I'm loving every minute of it. I have the same energy and enthusiasm as when I started in business in my early 30s. I feel like I'm more entrepreneurial.



ERIC KAYNE/HBJ

I just purchased an office building in the Upper Kirby District on 4 acres. "Morgan 1.0" would never have done that. Before, I'd have to buy a piece of land and build on it right away, since we were totally focused on apartment development. Now, if I find a good piece of real estate, I can buy it. I can be flexible.

This is a good real estate investment that I can hold for the long term and redevelop 10 or 20 years from now. It's at 3000 Richmond. It's a five-story, 93,000-square-foot building that's 98 percent leased.

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a builder, just like my father. Bill Morgan is my hero.

He came to America. He's a Holocaust survivor. He was penniless, couldn't speak English and only had a sixth-grade education. He's the one who taught me

the value of hard work, discipline and perseverance.

He'll be 87 in May.

He started in 1959 building duplexes, then apartments, then office warehouses. We worked on construction sites during the summers. I used that as a model, and my kids worked in construction in summers, too.

What keeps you awake at night?

Worrying about my unhappiest child, the thought of having a bad deal and, most recently, being so excited about work.

I wake up and I have to send emails to my co-workers about deals. I send out emails at 4 o'clock in the morning.

They think I'm obsessed and paranoid. ■

AGE: 54

HOMETOWN: Houston

WHAT IS YOUR PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT? Marrying my wife, Patti, in 1984.

HOW DID YOU MEET? I met her on a blind date that was set up by Amy Bernstein of Bernstein Realty.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST PET PEEVE? When people blame others for their problems. No one likes a whiner.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB? Working at Walter Pye's department store as a stock boy.

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