

Long struggle to break ground

By David Blymire, September 10, 2003 Sep 10, 2003



Central Pennsylvania has provided New York City developer David Schwartz with unique environmental challenges.

Schwartz was in Carlisle Tuesday to break ground on a Home Depot store proposed in Carlisle just 300 feet from the sensitive LeTort Spring Run.

"We never quit no matter how difficult it gets," Schwartz said Tuesday when asked why he stayed with the Carlisle project.

His company, Olympic Realty and Development Corp., also built a Home Depot store that opened in 1997 at a polluted former industrial site on Carlisle Pike in Hampden Township. In all, Olympic has built four retail projects in Central Pennsylvania.

He said most large projects are far from easy to build because government regulation is becoming stricter and "I think more people are getting involved in their communities in terms of what projects they'd like to see in their neighborhoods."

Appeals, reviews

The Carlisle Home Depot proposal has weathered court appeals by citizens' and conservation groups and lengthy reviews by the borough and state agencies including the state Department of Environmental Protection.

DEP enacted an "exceptional value" water quality rating in the nearby section of the LeTort in October 1997, more than one year before Schwartz publicly unveiled his Home Depot plans. The new designation subjected the proposal to closer scrutiny than was given to nearby Cracker Barrel and Sleep Inn, which were built in the late 1990s.

Schwartz said Tuesday he was given a hardhat to wear for the groundbreaking. "I should have put this on about four years ago," he joked.

Protecting waterway

The developer boasted that the LeTort would be protected by the "most sophisticated stormwater management system ever seen."

DEP issued permits for the new system earlier this year, calling it a model for how to build near exceptional value waterways.

All told, Schwartz said, he spent "millions of extra dollars" to get the project approved.

"We had a whole army of consultants," Schwartz said. "We studied everything down to the 'enth' degree. We knew the mating habits of mayflies."

While the Carlisle project was about protecting a pristine site, Hampden Commons was about rehabilitating contamination at the site of a former aluminum foundry and a nearby U.S. Navy property once listed as a federal "superfund" site, Schwartz said.

Hampden Commons opened in 1997 at the former site of a Capitol Products aluminum foundry in the 6000 block of Carlisle Pike that closed in 1991.

In all, it took about three years to get the Hampden project through the approval process, Schwartz said.