

# NewMark Merrill's \$175 Million Shopping Spree

Acquisition of small malls fuels expansion at retail real estate developer.

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## NEWMARK MERRILL COS.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Woodland Hills

**CEO:** Sanford Sigal

**BUSINESS:** Ownership and management of shopping centers.

**REVENUE:** \$15.1 Million

**NUMBER OF LOCATIONS:** 63 shopping centers in three states: California (53), Colorado (7) and Illinois (3).

**EMPLOYEES:** 110

**NOTABLE:** The name NewMark derives from Sigal wanting to leave a "new mark" on the retail industry.

By **MICHAEL AUSHENKER** Staff Reporter

**N**ewMark Merrill Cos. owns and runs shopping centers throughout the Golden State and elsewhere.

Among the local properties the Woodland Hills company owns are East Lancaster Shopping Plaza, West Hills Shopping Center, Westridge Shopping Center in Canoga Park, Topanga Willows in University Village in Woodland Hills, Agoura Meadows in Agoura Hills, Gelson's Village in Calabasas and Janss Marketplace in Thousand Oaks.

The company, which ranked No. 2 on the Business Journal's Fastest-Growing Company list, has engineered substantial growth in the last two years by acquiring about \$175 million worth of new assets, building about \$50 million in new shopping centers, and adding nearly a dozen new management assignments.

Chief Executive **Sandy Sigal** took an unusual route into the commercial real estate industry — through technology.

Even more unusual when you factor in that this was in the early 1990s that Sigal started his career in real estate at the age of 20 while studying at UCLA by boarding West Venture Cos., a Southern California-based homebuilder.

Sigal joined the company to computerize its business processes. Even today, Sigal continues to put a premium on the importance of keeping up with technology and, at NewMark Merrill, has dedicated a dozen people as part of an internal think tank to address technology within the company plus many more techies devoted to marketing.

"We have to be agile and that's hard to teach a big company," Sigal told the Business Journal in the awards-laden confines of his office at NewMark Merrill's corporate headquarters.

While at West Venture Cos., Sigal founded West Venture Commercial, the company's commercial retail division, and embarked on building or redeveloping — as well as managing — more than 25 shopping centers. In 1993, Sigal became chief executive and president of the parent company, which added to his responsibilities land acquisition, development and sales for to more than 700 homes, plus oversight of the commercial and mortgage divisions.

Four years later, the real estate entrepreneur co-founded NewMark Merrill Cos., then purchased the West Venture assets, including 15 retail centers and four development projects.

Today, NewMark Merrill counts 63 shopping centers with 1,500 tenants and a



Serial Developer: Sandy Sigal runs NewMark Merrill's 63 properties from his Woodland Hills headquarters; below, playing his favorite game.

PHOTOS BY THOMAS WASPER

combined 10 million square feet across three states in its asset pool. The company has offices in Thousand Oaks, Norwalk, Anaheim, Oceanside and Sacramento, as well as bases in the outlier states.

### Valley talent

Originally from Van Nuys, Sigal, over the past 27 years, has lived and raised four kids in Hidden Hills.

"It's just a different vibe," he said of his enjoyment of the Calabasas-adjacent community. "There are Valley people and city people. Here, it's always been Valley people."

Nearly all of that time, he has lived in the shadow of 21-year-old Commons at Calabasas. He said he has much respect for what developer **Rick Caruso** has done with upping the shopping center experience.

"He's an amazing visionary," Sigal said. "He's extraordinarily good at putting the pieces together and making it work."

However, it's not just architecture and the tenant mix which Sigal believes Caruso has gotten right, but "the way his team deals with people," and that is something Sigal also strives to do at his destinations. He puts human contact and personal connections above homogenous consumerism.

"Janss is almost an aberration for us," Sigal said of the latter. By that, he means it's unusually large as Sigal, who said he only runs about 10 or 15 large-scale properties, is not out to compete with the upscale **Caruso** and **Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield** retail centers but rather appeal to the middle-class and common citizens with smaller shopping centers and strip malls.

"We want to be that third place," he said, after home and work.

Sigal, who last month received **Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles'** Real



Estate & Construction Division award at a Beverly Hills Hilton ceremony, has long been active in community organizations, serving on the board of the **Camp Max Straus Foundation**, a Malibu facility for parent organization **Jewish Big Brothers/Big Sisters** for underserved children which Sigal attended when he was a child. In fact, Sigal credits Camp Max Straus for turning him around at age 8, when he would pull stunts such as retrieve leftover doughnuts from the dumpster behind a Winchell's Donuts shop and sell them

at school to his classmates.

In 2007, Camp Max Straus Foundation presented Sigal with its William Shatner Humanitarian Award for his active work on behalf of the cause. Through the Young Leadership Development Institute and the Jewish Federation's Real Estate Professional Organization, Sigal has volunteered hours as a mentor in both youth sports and in commercial real estate.

Sigal, who is currently engaged to re-marry, said philanthropy has always been part of his professional profile. He is chairman of **BrightStreet Ventures**, a company he co-founded to provide more opportunities to his tenants and other owners of centers by integrating online platforms with the traditional brick-and-mortar business.

### Perspective on growth

Sigal could see why his company ranked so high on the Business Journal's list of fastest-growing companies.

"We did take on a great number of assets," said Sigal, who intends to deepen his company's presence in Colorado and Illinois moving forward, even planting a flag in South Chicago because he spotted a corner where the fundamentals were just right.

But not every Southern California market yields retail gold, he noted. Even Simi Valley suffers from a very linear trade area as more people go from Simi into Thousand Oaks than the other way around.

"Every day is a struggle in a market that is changing as rapidly as it is now," he continued, noting that he invests his own money into funding such stunts as the Jingle Bell Jump — a Santa Claus parachute drop — to pump up attendance numbers at his malls.

"This isn't the real estate business," Sigal said. "This is the nightclub business."