

Long Island Business NEWS

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Where Business Gets Down To Business

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— ON THE JOB —

Part of an occasional series examining the work life of Long Islanders.

Building history

Shot by shot, Bill Greiner's collection of real estate photos has produced volumes of goodwill.

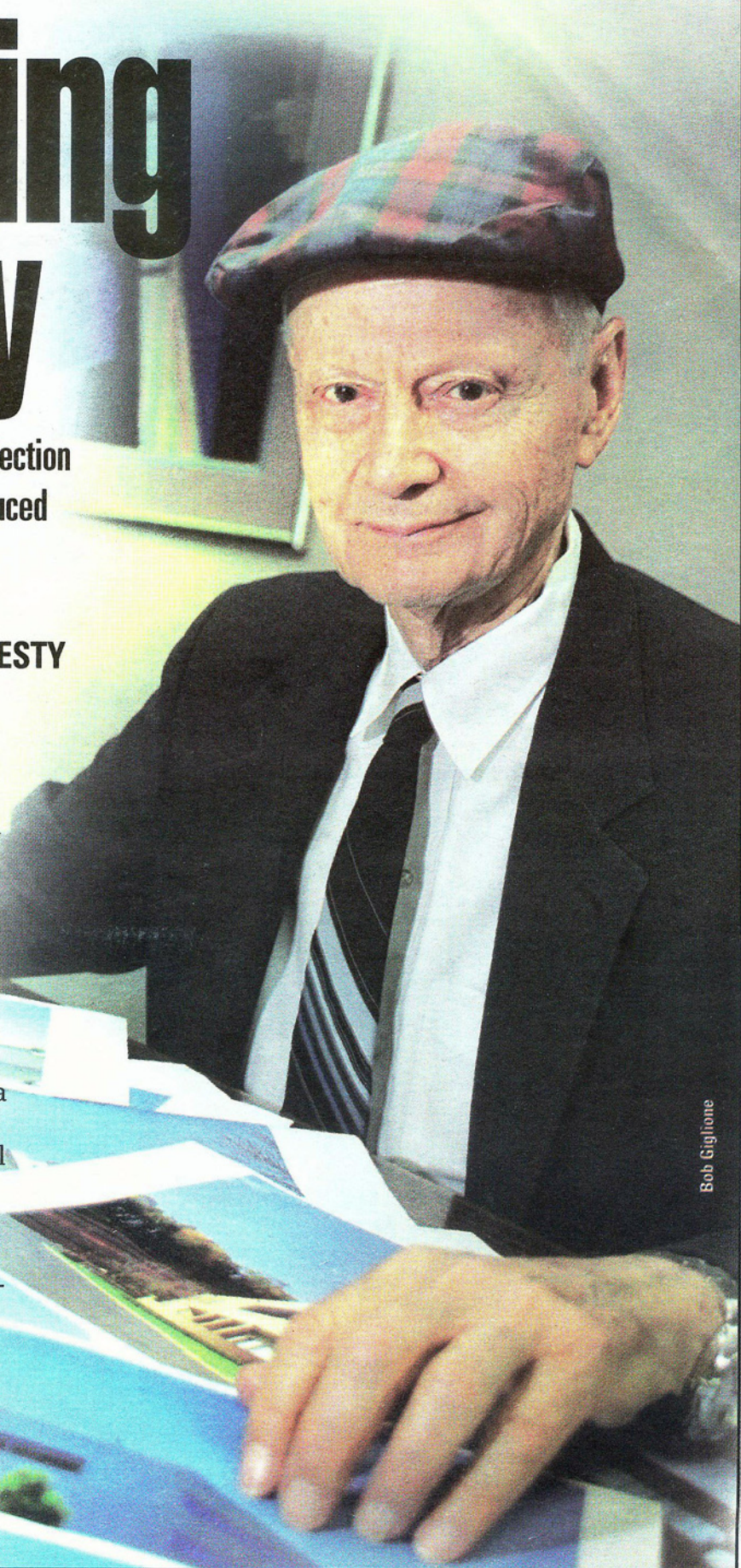
By DAWN WOTAPKA HARDESTY

It's just after 10:30 on a September Saturday morning. Summer's grip is slowly loosening on Long Island, but that's not evident from the picturesque sapphire sky or the balmy temperature ensuring packed beaches.

Don't look there for Bill Greiner.

Clad in a gray plaid suit and a white Kangol cap, the rail-thin octogenarian is behind the wheel of his 2004 black Lincoln Town Car, heading east on the Long Island Expressway. Today's goal is to photograph as many workaday buildings between exits 55 and 57 as possible, while canvassing the area for potential clients.

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Bob Gigliome

Greiner: With digital photos, starting all over again

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"This is the prime industrial area," he says. "This really isn't photogenic."

To anybody else, he must mean. For more than three decades, Greiner — who in 1953 co-founded Greiner-Maltz Co., one of the Island's first and most well-known commercial real estate brokers — has spent many Saturday mornings snapping the region's buildings.

He has amassed a collection that includes most "every industrial building over 10,000 square feet," he says. Shot by shot, it illustrates Long Island's eastward march and its changing architectural tastes — from field stones dotting entrances in the 1970s to the light brick and rounded corners prevalent in the 1980s.

"He has documented, through his photos, the history of Long Island commercial real estate," says Charles Tabone, a Newmark managing principal who launched his career at Greiner-Maltz in 1975 and recalls many a weekend photo run.

Today, Long Islanders know that if they need to know a building's tenant succession or how a site looked way back when, the answer is a phone call away.

"He'll help the guy out and doesn't charge a penny," says Jack O'Connor, a longtime Island broker now with Newmark who considers Greiner a friend — and a competitor. "It's his passion."

Goodwill on spec

It didn't start that way. Greiner's photography started to gain a competitive advantage — long before digital



For more than three decades, Bill Greiner has been amassing a photographic history of Long Island's commercial real estate.

Photos by Dawn Wotapka Hardesty

Happens all the time," Tabone says. "Everybody knows Bill Greiner. He's welcomed into many places because of all the things he sends people."

Greiner is also known for his free map club, which included copies of Long Island and New York City guides. But, thanks to electronic maps, sending hard copies is no longer necessary.

Color photographs eventually replaced black-and-white images. When that happened, Greiner knew to make extra copies stored with a slice of the negative.

But a drawback remained: "With the Kodak film, you either got it right the first time or you had to go back," says Dean Greiner, Bill's son, who works at the company and has been joining his father on some of these weekend canvas missions since 1984.

Bill Greiner's hue-filled shots fill 61 royal-blue and black binders in the corner of his 5,000-square-foot Woodbury office. The collection is cataloged alphabetically by locations and identified by curling yellowed stickers.

"I don't have the heart to throw this

out," Greiner says of the collection. "This is years and years of activity."

Digital redo

Six or seven years ago, Greiner switched to digital photos. Because scanning robs a color's definition, he had to re-photograph the Island's entire commercial stock.

"We went at it with a vengeance," he recalls.

At least this time, with digital technology, he could take several photographs, ensuring a usable shot. And his camera was lighter. "You could use this as a training weight," he says, while lifting the outdated Canon F-1 he stopped using about a decade ago.

About a year ago, he began phasing in panoramic shots to provide the "full horizontal scope without having distortion." That means he's upgrading his collection yet again, so some older buildings have been photographed multiple times.

"That's why I know where to stand to take a picture," he says. "I've been there a few times in the past."

Unlike many real estate firms, Greiner-

Maltz uses its own photography instead of that of outside firms that offer pictures with the click of a mouse. He won't even pay someone to do what some brokers consider mundane work.

Many such snapshots are "not taken from the eye of a real estate broker," says Dean Greiner. "They're looking at that property from a photographer's standpoint."

This must be a case where beauty really is in the eye of the beholder — even famed photographer Ansel Adams might find a challenge in livening up some bland industrial sites.

Greiner, however, says he can. Over the years, he's developed skills to best capture the subject: A perfect sky can make the shot, landscaping enhances the result and full trees can obstruct the building. Working on Saturday reduces the number of cars, added Dean Greiner: "We want the buildings to be the star of the show."

'Here were go. Cameras out.'

Greiner gently interrupts the photo chat between his son and two other employees at the first site: "Here were go. Cameras out."

He stops the car and takes several shots. A help-wanted sign is affixed to one building, a fact Greiner dictates into the voice recorder stored in his shirt pocket. Same thing for busy buildings. They're potential clients, he notes, and "it pays to give them extra attention."

Thanks to nature, a Motor Parkway shot should turn out well: "You've got sun, blue skies and a little bit of a whiff of white clouds."

Adds Dean Greiner, sitting in the back seat: "That's a nice contrast."

And so it goes for several more hours: Stop. Shoot. Record notes. Shoot some more.

During one stop, a man emerges from a building, Tension fills the car, but it dissipates when he's plainly dressed. "You get a uniform and a gun on the side and I'll be out of here in a hurry," Bill Greiner promises.

Because most of the pictures are taken from the road and inside the vehicle, Greiner reports he's never been chased away from a photo shoot "that I can remember."

After about 120 pictures — and a lunch of baked salmon and steamed broccoli — it's back to the office. He begins the arduous task of cataloging, lightening and cropping this Saturday's work.

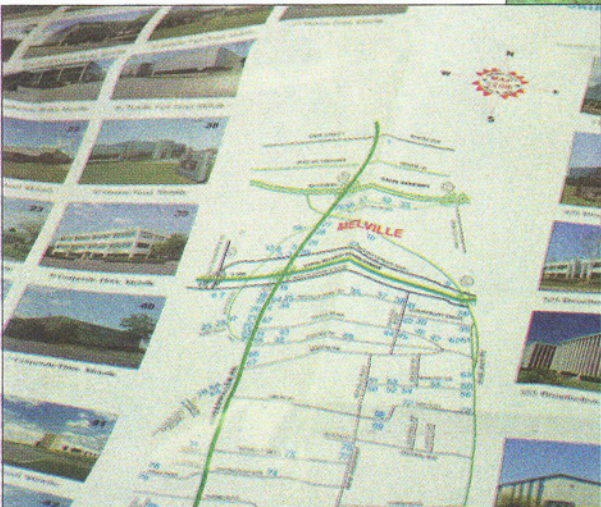
"This takes time," he admits. "This is what I don't like to do."

But that distaste isn't strong enough to stop. Will he ever?

"When I fall over," he says, erasing a building's shadow from one picture. "You've got to understand one thing: I enjoy what I do. That's important."



Greiner: Canon is king.



photos and low-cost printing — to bring space to a tenant and to market the property. He believes Greiner-Maltz led the way.

He doesn't remember the first building he photographed. He does know it was captured in black and white.

Back then, Greiner loaded up on Kodak film and snapped away. Some pictures boosted presentations while others were mailed to building occupants paired with what became a slogan attached to thousands of photographs over the years: "With our compliments."

Maybe the tenant will someday look to move, he surmised. Or maybe they'll know someone who is. Either way, someone got a free picture and, with hope, goodwill built up.

The practice continues today, though now they're e-mailed.

"Many times you'll walk into a building and you'll see the picture with 'compliments of Bill Greiner' tacked to the wall.