

W. Edwin Miller: His job developed in old buildings

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

When W. Edwin Miller was a boy on a Mount Joy tobacco farm, he expected to grow up to be a farmer just like his father and the generations before him.

But today, thanks to a changing economy, Miller heads Progressive Investments, Inc., a Lancaster-based development firm that specializes in finding adaptable uses for older buildings.

About four years ago, Miller bought a row house in the city at the urging of a friend who "kept after me for two years." After renovating the house and selling it, he bought another and did the same thing. He used the proceeds to start his business.

Earlier this year, he purchased the Swan Hotel, not far from his South Queen Street office/apartment, and plans to renovate it into an upscale restaurant. Most recently, Progressive Investments and the Housing Development Corp. completed a project on the former King Theater, taking an old movie house that had been vacant for years and turning it into affordable housing for the elderly.

Miller, 28, said he has more city-oriented redevelopment ideas churning in his head. He gets his ideas, he said, by following his dad's sage advice: think.

His family includes his parents, Yvonne and Wayne Henry Miller, who still farm in Mount Joy; sister Barbara, 30; and brothers Dwight, 27, and Quentin, 21. Quentin is also his business partner.

My father always told me: To think. That was his favorite line. I got a lot of energy and ambition from my father. He taught me so much in terms of principles. I really am a product of the way I grew up, and that makes me happy.

What I learned growing up on a farm: When you are young and live on a farm, you learn responsibility at an early age.

When you are the eldest son, like I was, you are born to be responsible. When you have to feed 600 head of cattle and 4,000 pigs a year, you had better keep your act together.

A farm is the best place to raise your kids because you can teach them responsibility and many other important things about life.

I've lived in Lancaster: All my life. Twenty-eight years. My great-great grandfather came over on a ship from Switzerland, and his whole family died en route, except for him. He was adopted by a family in Elizabethtown. Their house is still there. He married one of the family's daughters and, all these generations later, here I am.

What I like about Lancaster: It's a melting pot. If you start at the square in downtown Lancaster and count how many different churches there are, it is unbelievable. It makes Lancaster and central Pennsylvania more unique than any other area. We have Amish,

Mennonite, Lutheran, Pentecostal, you name it. I don't think there is an area anywhere else around that has such a melting pot of so many different denominations.

Community service activity: Maintaining the old buildings and finding new uses for them. It's a bigger challenge to take something old and find a new use for it. But I think that is part of this generation's job. We're in the clean-up generation. We're going to clean up the environment, the professional banking institutions after the savings and loan bailout, city governments, like Philadelphia, going bankrupt. Restoring downtown Lancaster is a part of that - recycling buildings and restoring what once was.

The best book I've read: I don't read books. I read newspapers. They inform you on what is going on day to day.

Favorite television show: CNN. It's up to date on changes in the world. I really don't have time to watch anything else.

How I relax: I like to go out and watch a lot of movies. I take a drive to Harrisburg and see a movie. I take a drive to Philadelphia and see a movie. I find that the drive does me well. I like any kind of movie. Action. Romance. Comedies. Horror. I like everything.

Favorite vacation spot: I go on short trips, usually over a weekend to New York or a weekend in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Washington D.C.

The worst thing about a vacation is coming back and getting into the groove of it again and picking up all the pieces, especially when you're in development, because 100 things can change from one week to the next.

What I enjoy most about my job: I like the challenges and the creativity. I like all the different people I meet and work with.

If there is one thing I've learned in life: It's that if you are persistent, you can achieve anything. You've got to be persistent. You can't let obstacles stand in your way.

The most important accomplishment in life: Developing your character is an accomplishment. Whether you do anything with your life,



your greatest accomplishment is what you make of yourself, what you become, because then you can pass on those traits to other people.

The person in history I most admire: William Penn. He was a Quaker. He was a conservative. He made Lancaster what it is today. He had all this land and no one here to develop it, so he went to Europe and brought people over here. That is why there is such a diversity of people, religion and culture here today. He made a lasting impression here.

The living person I most admire: I respect my father because of the things he taught me, like how to think in terms of concepts.

Also, we have four kids in our family, and none of us had any problem with drugs or alcohol. We're all stable people. How he and my mother did that, I don't know.

My greatest disappointment: I didn't start sooner. Instead of 25, I could have been doing what I'm doing now when I was 20 or 21.

What I'd like for myself in the future: I'd like to be happy and fulfilled with what I'm doing. To have good friends. I'd like to get married somewhere down the line and carry on the family tree.

My favorite hobby: I don't have a particular one. But I have fun in everything I do. I like the quiet and being alone sometimes. I like to think. I love to think.

—Lisa Christopher