

## SQUARE FEET

# Thriving Corporate Park Spurs Growth in Bronx

## From a Weedy Site to a Class A Building

By ELSA BRENNER

In 2001, when Joseph Simone, the president of the family-owned Simone Development Companies in New Rochelle, N.Y., bid \$3.7 million at a state auction for a weedy 18.5-acre site in the Bronx, home to an abandoned residential treatment center, skeptics wondered what such a normally astute businessman could possibly be thinking.

But as a headline in a local weekly trade magazine described it, Mr. Simone might have indeed been “Crazy — But Like a Fox.” Less than two years later, a Class A office building with 460,000 square feet of space and parking for 1,400 cars stood in the place of the treatment center. And instead of physically and mentally disabled youths, the tenants included the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, the Bronx campus of Mercy College, several governmental agencies and medical offices.

Across the road on what had been an empty lot, Mr. Simone has recently completed another Class A office structure in what has become an ever-expanding complex known as the Hutchinson Metro Center. A 280,000-square-foot, nine-story tower with four levels of underground parking, the new building is 90 percent leased to a variety of tenants, including lawyers and medically related businesses like Montefiore Medical Center’s orthopedic department and Comprehensive Care Management, a subsidiary of Beth Abraham Family of Health Services.

What the developer envisioned when he bid on the derelict parcel in the northern Bronx was a suburban-style office complex on a campus strategically situated about a mile from four major hospitals: Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Montefiore Medical Center, Calvary Hospital and Ja-

cobi Medical Center.

Mr. Simone described that area in particular, and indeed all of the Bronx, as “severely under-occupied.” So sure was he of his initial decision to buy the land that he has since acquired adjacent parcels, and the complex has more than doubled in size to 42 acres.

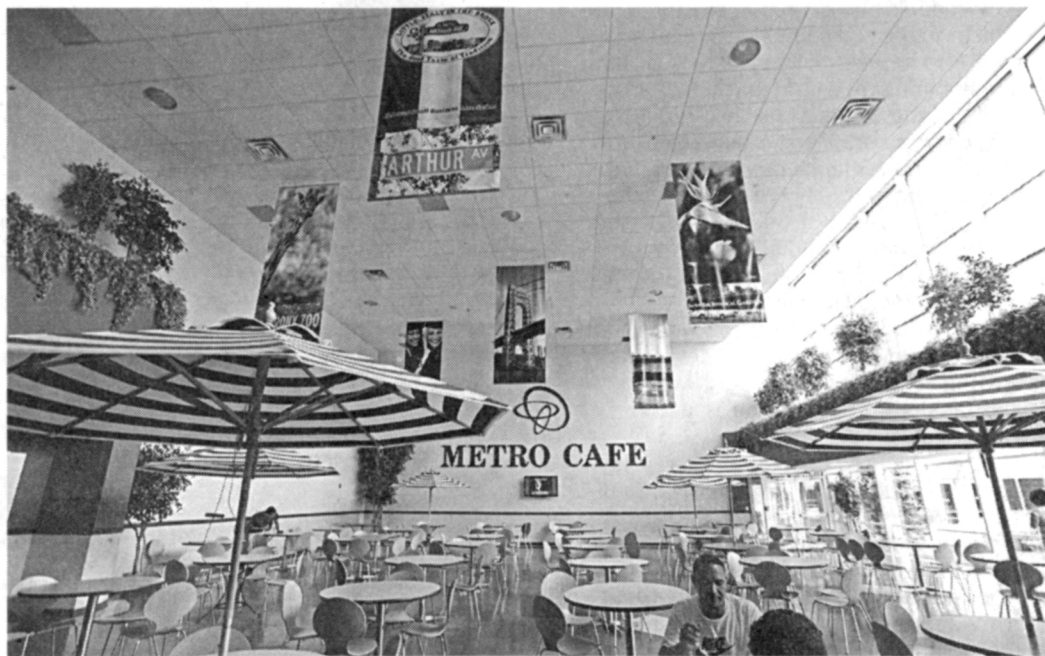
Mr. Simone is about to start construction this fall on a sister nine-story tower with a high-end hotel and conference center above the office space. The hotel would serve visitors to nearby health centers as well as Fordham University, Lehman College and Manhattan College, also in the borough, and out-of-towners doing business at the Bronx Criminal Court complex.

When completed in about five years, the Metro Center is expected to include two million square feet of office space, said Joseph Kelleher, the chief operating officer of the complex as well as the chairman of the board of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce. The City of New York is also planning to build a 911 emergency police and fire relay call center on eight acres on the north side of the complex.

The office buildings in the complex are being designed by Mitchell D. Newman, the president of Newman Design in Cold Spring Hills, near Huntington, N.Y.

Mr. Newman’s first task, which provoked an outcry from some architects and preservationists, was to partly demolish and then expand the former residential center, designed by the architect Richard Meier and completed in 1977. Mr. Newman replaced the treatment center’s signature elongated porthole-style windows with large expanses of blue glass and used an aluminum composite for the exterior, painting it bright white, he said, “to give it a crisp appearance.”

“It was all quite controversial,”



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARILYNN K. YEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The rapidly expanding Hutchinson Metro Center complex in the Bronx, top, includes a 280,000-square-foot, nine-story building that houses the Metro Cafe, above.

Mr. Newman said. “But we wanted to make a statement for a corporate park that has tremendous exposure to the Hutchinson River Parkway.” It is estimated that some 150,000 cars a day pass by the center, which Mr. Newman said was designed to appear to glow from within at night.

Moreover, the building has been constructed to handle heavy floor loads, which is crit-

ical for medical practices with massive pieces of equipment, like University Diagnostic Medical Imaging.

“With the advent of digital radiography,” said Dr. Marc Prager, the director and president of the imaging practice, “we either had to shut down our old office for several months in order to renovate it so it could handle the new technology, or move out altogether.

We chose the latter and moved here seven years ago.”

The complex’s site, close to both the Hutchinson River Parkway and Interstate 95, as well as public transportation, is accessible to a labor pool from a broad geographic area.

Tara Stacom, a vice chairwoman of Cushman & Wakefield, the leasing agency for the property, said the location was ideal

## Developers look toward an ‘under-occupied’ borough.

for workers at all salary levels. By comparison, in Westchester, where housing is costly, many employees have to travel from the Bronx, other parts of New York City or neighboring counties like Rockland.

Rents for Class A office space in the Bronx are \$30 a square foot and up at the Metro Center, Mr. Kelleher said. That compares with \$60 or more a square foot in Midtown Manhattan, Ms. Stacom said.

When the Metro Center opened, it added to a limited amount of Class A office space in the Bronx, Ms. Stacom said. Since Mr. Simone began construction, another Class A office building has opened outside of the Metro Center, bringing the total now to 1.8 million square feet, which Ms. Stacom described as “still exceptionally limited.” All together the Bronx has about 8.4 million square feet of office space, including storefronts and small walk-up buildings with no amenities.

Steven Kahn, one of the first tenants at Metro Center, moved his law practice, Peña & Kahn, which specializes in personal injury lawsuits, to 4,000 square feet in the renovated Meier building in 2005 from a storefront in the South Bronx. “As our business grew,” Mr. Kahn said, “we found it difficult to recruit new lawyers because they didn’t want to work in some storefront in a high-crime area.” The firm has since expanded in the first building, which provides 24-hour security, and will move again this summer to 14,000 square feet in the recently completed tower.

“In general, the Bronx has been like a desert when it comes to decent office space,” Mr. Kahn said. “I can’t believe someone didn’t think of building something like this sooner. It’s what you’d expect to find in White Plains or Garden City, but until now, you couldn’t find it here.”