

Lloyd Bliss; Warwick Mall developer, former Civic Center Authority chairman

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PROVIDENCE — Lloyd E. Bliss, 90, the real-estate magnate who moved the center of Rhode Island shopping from downtown Providence to the suburbs when he built Warwick Mall in the late 1960s and early 1970s, died of congestive heart failure Saturday at Oak Hill Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center, Pawtucket.



He was the husband of the late Estelle (Leif) Bliss.

Mr. Bliss, who lived at 110 Lincoln Ave., on Providence's East Side, owned many parking lots and buildings in downtown Providence and developed Newport's first modern shopping center on Bellevue Avenue in 1958.

But it was as the key developer of Warwick Mall that Mr. Bliss had his biggest impact. By turning a gravel pit and vegetable farm near the intersection of Routes 95 and 295, and Routes 2 and 5, into a million square feet of retail space, he changed the face of Rhode Island shopping.

When it opened in stages over several years in the early 1970s, the all-weather mall became a destination for generations of Rhode Islanders, who met girlfriends and boyfriends hanging out in its restaurants and open spaces, and did their Christmas shopping at such department stores as Filene's and the former Jordan Marsh.

As the mall became a fixture of life in Rhode Island, it drew shoppers — 200,000 of them a week — from Providence's seen-better-days downtown, where the city's signature department stores — the Outlet, Shepard's, the Boston Store — had failed or were

foundering.

Mr. Bliss was known as a dogged business competitor, a man not easily discouraged. When plans for the Warwick Mall became snarled in regulatory and other problems, he forged ahead.

"He was a very determined man, a real professional and a gentleman," said former Gov. Philip W. Noel. Noel was mayor of Warwick during the years the mall proposal was on the drawing board and he helped Mr. Bliss seal the real-estate deal needed to complete construction.

By 1976, the mall was the state's largest retail facility, with about 1.1-million square feet of space. Today only the Providence Place mall is larger, with about 1.3-million square feet.

Mr. Bliss's mall followed the post-World War II exodus of people from the state's old factory cities, notably Providence and Pawtucket, to such suburbs as Cranston and Warwick. In 1960, Providence's share of state retail sales was 36 percent, and Warwick's was less than 10 percent. By 1980, Providence's share had dropped to 17 percent, and Warwick's had grown to 16 percent.

In the two decades between 1960 and 1980, Providence's population dropped by 26 percent, while Warwick's increased by 26 percent.

Mr. Bliss was a star athlete at Hope High School, where he played football and was captain of the basketball team. He attended Cornell and Brown Universities, dropping out of Brown in the Depression years of the 1930s to work in his family's furniture business, Rhode Island Supply, which had stores in Hoyle Square and on Weybosset Street in Providence.

He was involved in several civic and professional groups. He was a trustee of Roger Williams University and treasurer of the Blackstone Park Improvement Association. He was a longtime

member of the Aurora Civic Association.

In the mid-1970s, he was chairman of the Providence Civic Center Authority, before being ousted after a political joust with Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. Mr. Bliss asserted he was ousted because he refused to create jobs for two of Cianci's political allies. Cianci denied that.

The Rhode Island Reds minor-league hockey franchise closed while Mr. Bliss was chairman of the civic center authority. Mr. Bliss said he liked the Reds but could not tolerate a franchise drawing only about 2,000 fans per game to the 12,000-seat arena.

"I don't have the authority to indulge sentiment," Mr. Bliss said in a typically blunt 1977 statement when the Reds asked for concessions to keep the team playing in Providence. The arena had lost more than \$100,000 on Reds games during the 1975-76 season.

Among the Providence properties owned or co-owned by Mr. Bliss were Doris Place on Waterman Street; the Union Trust Building on Westminster Street; the Civic Center Parking Garage; the Shoppers Parking Deck on Weybosset Street; the Amica Building, a downtown landmark; and the Packet Building, on South Main Street.

Long an advocate of exercise, Mr. Bliss could be seen in later years walking miles at such East Side landmarks as Blackstone Boulevard and in Blackstone Park. He loved to read and was an avid amateur photographer. He also wrote poems and verse about friends and family.

He leaves a brother, Robert Bliss; two children, Dan Bliss and Jane Bliss Garabedian; and three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He was the brother of the late Maynard Bliss.

Funeral services were private.

BLISS, Lloyd E.

November 10, 2001. Beloved husband of the late Estelle (Leif) Bliss. Residence: Lincoln Avenue, Providence. Dear father of Dan M. Bliss, Riverside and Jane Garabedian, Cranston. Loving brother of Robert Bliss, Boca Raton, FL and the late Maynard Bliss. Devoted grandfather of Gary, Lisa, Delores and great-grandfather of Diandra, Ross, Casey, and Conor. The funeral service was private. The family was assisted with the arrangements by SUGARMAN-SILVERMAN MEMORIAL CHAPEL.

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