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## Office real estate magnate John Cali dies at 95

John J. Cali, who died on Saturday at 95, was an immigrant coal miner's son who grew up in Passaic and once played jazz with American music legend Hoagy Carmichael. But Cali was better known for something else — he helped create one of the great real estate success stories in New Jersey.

Cali, a longtime Montclair resident, his brother Angelo and their childhood friend Edward Leshowitz founded Cali Associates in 1949. Nearly 50 years later, in 1997, their company would merge with Rochelle Park-based Mack Co., creating the largest office-property owner in New Jersey. Mack-Cali Realty Corp., based in Edison, generated \$704.7 million in revenue in 2012 and owns 279 properties and 31 million square feet of office space, buildings that bear the Cali name in virtually every corporate office park in North Jersey.

“They were very, very smart people,” said Donald Eisen, now an executive director for Cushman & Wakefield Inc. in East Rutherford. “They were inventive, creative. ... Obviously, an American success story, which is you start with nothing and you create great wealth and great good.”

The Cali family launched its real estate empire by building single-family homes and apartment complexes, later expanding into office development and helped develop the real estate investment trust.

John J. Cali was known for his “elegant” manner, modesty, honesty and philanthropy, donating \$5 million to Montclair State University in 2008 to establish a music school there that bears his name.

“I spent a lifetime building buildings and creating them and having those satisfactions,” Cali told The Montclair Times in 2010. “Well, they were good. And they were rewarding and acknowledged. But they were nothing like this. This is really special.”

Cali was the son of an Italian immigrant who worked as a coal miner in Colorado before relocating the family to Passaic. Cali and his brother Angelo would later meet their partner Leshowitz in the Passaic County city. John Cali graduated from Clifton High School, and worked his way through Indiana University by playing saxophone and clarinet.

“The thing that he told me that was most impressive was that when he was at Indiana University, he played in a jazz band with Hoagy Carmichael,” said Robert Cart, director of the John J. Cali School of Music at MSU. “I’m from Indiana and grew up near Bloomington thinking that Hoagy Carmichael was one of the greatest composers ever. To hear that John had performed with him, that was really something that caught my attention.”

The Calis broke new ground in the Garden State in terms of commercial real estate. In 1994 they took their family-owned company public as Cali Realty Co., creating the first office real estate investment trust (REIT) in New Jersey. REITS are investment vehicles specializing in real estate and real estate

mortgages and were created to provide an investment structure similar to the structure mutual funds provide for stock investing.

“This new vehicle would allow commercial real estate access to the capital markets,” said L. Robert Lieb, chairman of Woodland Park-based Mountain Development Corp. “And their [Cali’s] buildings are still the anchor and the core of the current Mack-Cali real estate trust.”

Now REITs are major real estate vehicles, said Eisen, who like Lieb has known the Cali family for decades and did business with John.

“Wall Street eventually caught on that these REITs were a great way to own real estate for the public,” Eisen said. “As a result, if you look around the REITs are probably the major factor in commercial real estate, residential real estate, hotel real estate, retail real estate. ... You had the creation of a new world.”

Cali served as chairman of Cali Realty through its merger with Mack and retired as chairman in 2000.

“His impact on the industry in the New Jersey region will forever be evident,” said Mack-Cali President and Chief Executive Officer Mitchell Hersh, in a statement. “His experience, knowledge, guidance, philanthropy and friendship will be greatly missed.”

Some of Cali’s trophy developments include 50 Tice Blvd. in Woodcliff Lake and the International Financial Tower in Jersey City.

Cali’s gift to Montclair State endows music-school scholarships and visiting artists, and students appreciate that.

“He was very proud of his business success, but the thing that gave him the greatest pleasure was the ability it gave him to support the aspirations of others,” said Montclair State University President Susan Cole. “When he would come, as he often did, to student performances the students would flock around him and say, ‘Oh, Mr. Cali, we’re so glad you came. Thank you so much.’”

Cali and his wife, Rose, lived in a home formerly owned by Yogi Berra and were good friends with the former Yankee catcher and his wife. Cole had often visited the Cali home, and she knew John’s late brother Angelo, as well.

“Angelo was sort of the analytical thinker, and John was the one who knew had to manage people,” Cole said. “Together with Ed [Leshowitz] they were able to put together a very successful vision.”

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