

# **P**rofile DAVID MARTIN

**David Martin says he was "the poorest kid in Cary" growing up here in the 1940s. Now he is the owner of South Hills Mall and Plaza, as well as numerous other developments.**

**BY CHRIS HUBBARD**  
STAFF WRITER

David Martin became a businessman out of necessity.

His father died when Martin was a young boy. Martin's mother, Euva, who had already been widowed once before, had four children with Martin's father. After her second husband's death, she moved them from Randolph County to Raleigh.

It was during the Great Depression, and the family had little money.

"My first day of school, my brother and I each had a 2 and a half cent lunch," Martin said. "We split a 5 cent honey bun."

Shortly after, when Martin was 8, the family moved to Cary, where they rented

a house on Pleasants Avenue.

"I was the poorest kid in Cary," Martin said. "Nobody in Cary ... was as poor as we were."

Martin took it on himself to make money for the family — in any way he could figure out to do it. By the time he was 11, he was bringing in half of the family's income.

"He just wasn't satisfied with the situation as it was," said Lawrence "Footsie" Furr, who was five grades ahead of Martin at Cary High School. "He wanted to change it."

Martin cut and shucked corn for a farmer for half of the profit. He bought apples from a man he knew for 25 cents per peck; sold them for 50 cents. He cut down cedar trees and sold them for Christmas trees. He tended people's

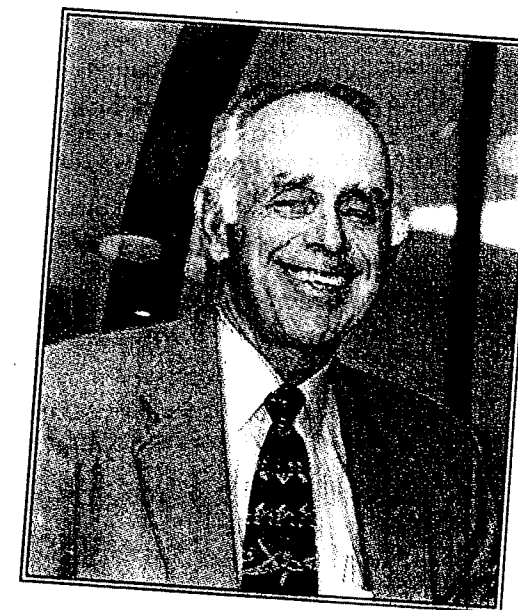
gardens and chicken coops. He picked blackberries from all over Cary and sold them for 5 cents a quart, canning what he didn't sell.

"There was never a blackberry that fell to the ground because it was too ripe, because I was there to get it," Martin said.

Using old lumber and Tru-Aid signs he had been given, he built his own chicken coop. He didn't have money to buy chickens, however, so he adopted 50 sick chickens that a hatchery had thrown away. He nursed 48 of them back to health, and sold them by pushing them around town in a cart.

He rented a mule and plowed gardens for people. He also had a garden at

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## MARTIN

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FROM 1B

home.

"He was so dedicated to his work that when he got started on something, nothing would stop him," Furr said.

Martin graduated from Cary High School in 1945, but his need to help support his family kept him from focusing on academics. Martin said he only had time to study at home once during his senior year. And he missed part of the afternoon at school to work.

"I'd skip study period, thumb to Raleigh and work for the Piggly Wiggly grocery store," he said.

More than a half century later, Martin, who is now 70, is still figuring out ways to make money. He has become a successful developer and landlord, with South Hills Mall and Plaza among the projects he has built and operates.

"He started buying property — just going in debt for it," said Doug Holleman, 78, who remembers Martin when he first moved to Cary. "He kept on going. He started building homes and one thing led to another."

Looking back, Martin is thankful for the lessons in entrepreneurship he learned because he had no choice. He also appreciates the work ethic he developed.

"I figured out that work is a gift from the Lord," Martin said. "To enjoy your work and have something to do is a blessing from the Lord."

### A CHANCE WITH REAL ESTATE

After high school, Martin worked awhile for Advance Auto Parts, then joined the U.S. Coast

Guard. In the Coast Guard, Martin learned to be a motor machinist. And, because he was sending over half of his check back home, he still had to find ways to make money. So he bought an iron and starting charging to wash and iron uniforms. He also started cutting people's hair.

When Martin got out of the Coast Guard, he wanted to come home. But he couldn't find a job here as a machinist, so he started working for Jim's Cleaners, delivering laundry. He would get 25 cents for every \$1 of cleaning he carried.

Martin wanted to become a lawyer, and attended UNC-Chapel Hill for awhile on a G.I. Bill.

"I just thought it would be fun to defend the underdog," Martin said.

But Martin's career path led to real estate not the law.

Martin bid on old houses at the corner of Western Boulevard and Dan Allen Drive in Raleigh that N.C. State was selling to anyone willing to move them. Martin, who got the duplexes for a minimal price, moved them to a location off Avent Ferry Road and started University Apartments, a development that he has since expanded significantly. Martin is still collecting rent on the units he moved.

"You have to start somewhere," Martin said, "and you have to start at the bottom when you don't have anything."

Martin also paid \$1,200 for a dilapidated house in Cary on East Chatham Street that he fixed up and sold, keeping land behind the house that he still owns. He moved one half of one of the duplexes he got from State there, where it still stands off Waldo Street.

Using the \$7,000 he sold the

house for, he started his own dry cleaning business, Martin's Cleaners, with a location in Raleigh first and then Cary. Martin eventually got out of that business. He also was in the used car business for awhile, operating his own dealership before selling it.

After University Apartments, Martin's real estate efforts became focused on Triangle Forest off Old Apex Road. The main road through the subdivision, Marilyn Circle, is named after Martin's wife of 44 years.

Martin bought the 62 acres for the subdivision, under an agreement that he had a year to pay for the land. Martin held an auction for lots at the front of the subdivision and made more than enough money to cover the purchase price for the entire tract, he said.

Martin decided he wanted to build a shopping center, so he started reading about ideal shopping center locations in books he borrowed from one of his tenants at University Apartments, Jerry Turner, who is now a prolific local land planner.

When Martin saw the land where South Hills Mall now stands, he felt it was the perfect site, being able to serve both Raleigh and Cary. Martin paid \$110,000 for 78 acres. The seller carried the note for 4.5 percent interest.

Other developments owned by Martin or the family trust he has set up for his six children include Plantation Square and I-40 Centre and several residential developments.

"He's what I would call, if there's ever been one, a self-made

man," said Bob Godbold, who grew up in Cary after Martin did. "It wasn't an overnight deal. He's worked all along.... He's made what he's got slow and hard."

Martin said God has blessed him with an ability to spot good real estate deals.

"You have to have a vision," Martin said about his real estate success. "You have to see something that other people don't see."

### 'A MAN OF GOD'

Martin is unabashedly a conservative Christian. He is a former president of the Wake County Taxpayers Association, a conservative group. He also is active in the Southern Baptist Convention, serving as a representative for First Baptist Church.

"He's a man of God," Holleman said. "I don't know anybody who's brought more people to Christ. All through the years, if he's around [someone] very long, he'll find out if they're saved."

Martin, who credits his mother with instilling in him his Christian principles, sticks by his Christian beliefs in his business practices.

"One thing I really love is he does not make you maintain Sunday hours like a lot of malls do because he's a Christian man and he believes that's a time to be at church and with family," said Bonnie Campbell, the owner of Country Sunshine, which leases space in South Hills Mall.

Martin tries to attract wholesome businesses, Campbell said.

"He wants it to be a Christian family mall, where you can bring your children and they're not

embarrassed when you see something," she said.

Another example of his Christian business philosophy is that he allows start-up churches to meet in space at South Hills at no charge. Over the years, nine churches have started there, he said.

Martin also refuses to lease space to any restaurant that serves alcohol. He volunteers with the Gideons and so has seen the results of alcohol abuse during visits with convicts in prison.

"I've seen 85 percent of the people in prison because of alcohol — either direct or indirect — or drugs," he said. "I see the wreckage it causes."

His policy on alcohol limited his options when looking for a restaurant for an outparcel of South Hills. But Martin is happy with the results. He negotiated with Harry Smith, the owner of K&S Cafeterias, to open a K&S and the cafeteria has been hopping with business. Burlington Coat Factory in South Hills saw a 62 percent increase in its sales volume during the first week K&S was open, Martin said.

As he has done since he was a boy, Martin is still working hard.

"What I'm doing now, I'm doing for my children and my grandchildren," he said.