

*The Kitchen Building Townhomes*  
*Ft. Sheridan, Illinois*

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# Business

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## 'New' fort to reflect old story



### 'The historic element is kind of the defining issue up there'

By J. Linn Allen  
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Chicago mega-project developer Richard Stein calls Bruce Abrams "without peer" anywhere in the country in historic preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

That kind of hyperbole is hard to prove. But it's safe to say Abrams' inclusion on the Stein-led team that has been awarded the contract to redevelop Ft. Sheridan will put him up with the nation's leaders in that real estate niche.

The Stein & Co. team was awarded the rights to create a historic village on about 110 acres of the former North Shore lakesfront military base by the cities of Highwood and Highland Park Monday.

The project, a crown jewel

among residential developments that could rake in total sales of \$200 million, will commence after the Stein team and the two towns negotiate with the Army on a price for the land.

The team, formally a partnership called the Town of Ft. Sheridan Co., is composed of Stein, Abrams' Chicago-based L.R. Development Co., home builder Red Seal Development Corp. of Northbrook and Project Management Advisors of Chicago, a real estate consulting firm.

Abrams' company will be responsible for rehabbing the base's 94 historic landmark buildings, including stables, barracks and jail buildings as well as homes, into some 300 luxury condominiums without violating their essential character.

"The historic element is kind of the defining issue up there," said Stein. "Bruce Abrams is the best, and we went out and got the best."

Heady words, especially for a 34-year-old lawyer who only got into real estate eight years ago after working in the Chicago office of Skad-

den, Arps, one of the country's biggest law firms.

The Des Plaines native switched fields after finding he was more interested in business than law and started out redeveloping run-down apartment buildings that were historic only in terms of their age.

He still rehabs old apartment buildings in the city for low-income renters, but concurrently has carved out a specialty of working on architectural gems, especially on the Gold Coast.

He did his first major historical building, the Chandler at 33 E. Bellevue Place, only a few years ago and followed that up with the former Playboy Mansion at 1340 N. State Pkwy. His major coup came last year with the acquisition of the stately Mayfair Regent Hotel on East Lake Shore Drive, which he is converting to million-dollar-plus condos.

But these projects pale in comparison to the task at Ft. Sheridan. "It's a spectacular project," said Abrams. "There are certainly great challenges."

Built in part to protect Gilded Age Chicago magnates living in Lake Forest who were fearful of anarchists and labor agitators after the Haymarket Riots in 1886,

Ft. Sheridan was designed as a military showplace by the renowned Chicago firm of Holabird & Roche. That accounts for the federal designation of its parade ground buildings as historic landmarks.

Abrams, who was named to the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois last summer, said the most complex adaptation problem could be posed by the stables, which are long, narrow structures with pitched roofs and no window openings.

"We're excited about the opportunity of coming up with interesting and creative solutions," he said.

Abrams said he doesn't expect construction work on Ft. Sheridan to begin until the end of this year, which will allow him to wind down other projects.

In addition to the Mayfair conversion, the firm is building a new condo building on an adjacent lot on Walton Street, redeveloping the old Wieboldt's department store at the North Side's Lincoln-Belmont-Ashland intersection into condos and retail space, and turning an old bowling alley with a historic facade on Belmont Avenue into loft residences.