

Swaney's flamboyance and Yarbrough's business savvy form a solid union

Continued from page 2 fields of both. He says his portfolio is evenly divided between the clubs and restaurants and his real estate interests. He says he operates both businesses at a profit.

Since 1988, when Jeff founded The Delphi Group, he has broken, developed and managed downtown properties.

"It's really hard because people want to pigeonhole you: 'Oh, no you can't do this real estate project, you're the club guy.' Or, 'You can't do this thing in the restaurants, you're the real estate guy,'" Jeff says. "The yuppies thought it was too bohemian and the boomhans thought I was too yuppie."

"Some of the radical kids in Deep Ellum questioned Swaney's motives because they saw the growth of his clubs and his empire," says Phil Torian, of Phil's Natural Grocery. He has known Jeff since Mr. Torian ran Phil's Natural Eats on Elm Street.

"The truth of the matter is, Jeff has done a lot of things that have benefited Deep Ellum."

"Not everyone agrees with that assessment. Michael Morris counts himself among those who haven't always seen eye-to-eye with Jeff Swaney. In the late '80s, he says, "there were a few of us experiencing a little success in our respective businesses and the neighborhood had not settled in yet. I had some questions about how to promote it and Jeff saw it another way. He had a giant crane with these guys bungee jumping and these carnival rides that were intended to create traffic. I thought they were out of character for Deep Ellum."

"Jeff Swaney knows he is the neighborhood's most controversial figure."

"You'll have some people saying, 'Oh, Jeff's great, he's done some great things for the neighborhood, good things for the artists and musicians,'" says Jeff. "On the other hand, there are people who say, 'He sold out, he's doing this thing in North Dallas, he's just making money, he made buildings cost too much because he got people interested in buying them. But I say present the facts and let everyone make their own opinion.'"

"I haven't done anything expressly evil."

"That's exactly what it was," Jeff says. "An alternate term would be wannabe, right?" says Jeff.

"I think of it as marketing standpoint," Jeff says. "It's how I'll pitch something I might book: 'We can help you drive your product because we have the people that other people watch.'"

"I've seen places cater to that group - whatever you want to call them, celebrities, wannabes, the see-and-been crowd. When those people are finished doing that thing and a new place opens, they kill the old one," Jeff Swaney says.

"We would never seek to be that place some see-and-been crowd exclusively inhabits."

"Swaney is focused on the future and Yarbrough is focused on the present. That's a strong combination."

When she delivered the news to her parents, her father "told her she was too young."

"I had some apprehension, but it was overcome because I think Jeff is very talented and extremely hard-working," says Mr. Torian. "It's the craziest business in the world and I had some concerns about whether he would be able to make her happy. Tara is spoiled. Her closet at home was bigger than the house she's living in now."

Months passed before Jeffrey even had a conversation with his future father-in-law about their common interest: the restaurant business. He and Mr. Swaney were seeking investors for their spin-off when Tara encouraged her future husband to pitch her father on the deal. Jeffrey had misgivings.

"I didn't want a free ride and I thought it could be perceived as that," he explains. So when he met with Mr. Lavine, he "started the meeting by saying, 'I'm going to marry your daughter and I'm going to be able to take care of her. I want to do this on my own.' He said, 'I don't think it's a good deal I won't do it. If I do think it's a good deal, I will do it. And by putting my name on it, it might help you guys.'"

"And it did. It gave the deal credibility, which is what Jeff and I really needed."

"The cool factor"

"People love to think they're cool," Jeffrey Yarbrough is saying. "It's the celebratory thing and there's a whole gamut of them."

Celebrities"

"I don't like that phrase," says Mr. Swaney. "It's something we picked up and used internally to define some people who aren't important."

"Sweetheart deal"

"The Jeffs were confirmed bachelors when they went on the auction block at the 1993 Master's Bachelor/Bachelorette Bid. By the end of the evening, three women had paid \$4,000 on the Jeffs' date packages."

"As an Evening in Deep Ellum package, Jeff and Tara watched his future wife, the former Tara Lavine, go for \$1,800.

A year would pass before they met again.

Tara, just out of college and back home in Dallas, was at the Blind Lemon with a group of friends when Jeffrey, talking to a group of people at the bar, spotted her.

"I always thought she was, like, perfect cute," Jeffrey says now. "I thought he was a little," says Tara, 25. "Don't tell him I said that." She laughs. "Six months later we were engaged."

Rich Profiles JEFF SWANEY & JEFFREY YARBROUGH

Downtown's partners of cool head uptown

BY KIMBERLY GOAD

First glance, this duo just seems like the Matt & Jeff of Dallas. One swags, the other oozes. One is a hipster, the other is a yuppie.

Jeff and Tara had been restaurateur and real estate developer who helped build up Deep Ellum and its surrounding areas. They were looking for a description to describe their neighborhood and make it identifiable to who they like - and everything else has an opinion on Mr. Swaney.

Jeffrey - the name he prefers to use when he is found himself partnered with another Jeff - was an old friend of Michael Mabel's. Mabel, who founded Star Butch & Freshman year at Texas Wesleyan University and was a Dallas resident, had been a friend of Jeffrey's since year you could addily call him Dr. Dean. On a hot redneck day in Dallas, Jeffrey met Jeffrey in intensive care following a heart attack.

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Jeff Swaney (left) and Jeffrey Yarbrough at Lavaca Cantina, one of the eateries in their new four-on-one venture in Fair Park.

Translating Deep Ellum hip to Far North Dallas hic

Continued from page 1 out under a rock, to do whatever they wanted to do to express themselves. Two years later, he partnered with investor Paul Lehman to reopen his current location, spending what then seemed like an obscene amount of money (\$70,000) to turn an old transmission shop into a live-music venue.

"It was a labor of love," says Mr. Swaney, now 36. "You can't do this for \$70,000. You could just about get the air conditioner in this space for that much."

He is sitting in the far corner of Young Mother's Hip, the 80-style coffee bar that makes up one-quarter of the new complex. It's 8:45 on a Friday afternoon, minutes before the beginning of their sixth weekend in the new neighborhood and the air conditioner is virtually out of order. More than that, the ceiling fans on the patio look as if they are about to spin off their moorings and into oblivion. "I told these guys to fix those fans out there," Mr. Swaney laughs. "Look at them, they're about ready to fall off. That's driving me crazy."

In addition to the Art Bar and Blind Lemon, the new Swaney-Mabel portfolio includes newcomers Lavaca Cantina and Yow Mother's Hip. Club Clever, with its concrete floors, dry-clip paint and exposed brick walls, defies translation.

"It's a mammoth undertaking," says Mr. Swaney. "These things we build, this one and the one downtown, they're very difficult to run, they're complicated, they have a lot of moving parts."

Thirty investors back the new venture, including Jeffrey Yarbrough's father-in-law, Jack Lavine, the founder of Chili's, and real estate developer Vaughn Miller.

Mr. Miller's first response when the Jeffs called about leasing space in the shopping center is "I don't know. I don't know."

"This was a club out of Deep Ellum," Mr. Miller, president of the commercial real estate division of Miller Realty Group. "But when they began to educate us on the concept, that was more than a club out of Deep Ellum, it was a place to fall in love with the concept. We were taking an old shopping center that was in disrepair and we were going to re-vent and put in new tenants. What better tenant than a restaurant. That's cutting-edge and brings something fresh to the area."

The challenge, of course, is translating "cool," as Jeffrey Yarbrough says, "Everybody likes to think they're cool."

Jeff Swaney even named the restaurants' parent company Cool Mission III "because we're on a quest to do some cool things in a place where cool things don't exist."

Early figures say they're succeeding. Six weeks after they opened, Jeff says the complex is doing better than \$30,000 a month in sales, replacing the four-on-one enterprise

SELF-PORTRAIT

Jeffrey Yarbrough (left) and Jeff Swaney greet Mayor Ron Kirk (center) at a Deep Ellum reception.

among the 10 top-growing restaurants in Dallas. The Road. It's too soon, of course, to determine how much of the initial crowd is made up of curiosity seekers. "When I opened Tango, people didn't see how it was a world wide," says 8 owner Shonnon Wynne, a longtime fixture on the club and restaurant scene. "They sat on the sidewalks with a cash register and they'd get this number of people through the doors six nights a week. In the end, they were right. I was doing something that was big and multi-conceptual in a part of town that was necessarily high-traffic (Swaney and Yarbrough) know a lot more than I did then, but I see asking them a lot of the same questions."

"You can't reproduce the product, but you can't recreate the vibe or the scene that's created on a street corner in Deep Ellum," says Michael Morris, owner of Martini Ranch, as well as Club One and 2826 East Dallas. "It's a public thing. There's enough people to support what they're doing, but I think it's a little ambiguous. There's some soulfulness about being downtown you just don't get on Belt Line."

But Jeffrey Mabel points out, "Both of them are the kings of networking."

"When you meet Jeffrey Yarbrough, he wants to have your business card so he can know what you're doing and how it might fit in with what he's doing," says Mr. Mabel, who was operating partner of the old Past & Cook Club when he met the Jeffs 19 years ago. "When you meet Jeffrey Yarbrough, he wants you to know what he's doing and then he wants your business card so that you can be on his mailing list. Swaney can't get that card fast enough and then suddenly you're getting a lot of mail."

As president of Surrender Inc., Mr. Mabel says he's seen start-up companies and companies preparing for launch. He signed on with the Jeffs in 1982.

"When we first started out, they were sustaining eight years of success," he says. "But they were tripping over each other. I've had five years, that's something you brag about to your friends. I'd be bragging about it."

"We have a pile of something tangible that people are interested in. I've created that by networking and promoting by hosting certain events, celebrities, groups, whatever. And it's created an aura around the place. Here for a reception honoring Mayor Ron Kirk. The new mayor agreed to be the pinstruck of the event. The Jeffs, targeting the entrepreneur in the race, fed Kirk volunteers throughout the campaign."

"They're big supporters," explains Mr. Swaney, who has traded in his regular uniform of shirts, "t-shirt and Birkenstocks for the pinstruck of a real estate developer. Jeff, meanwhile, sports the distinct look of someone who used to work for a fashion publication. He has a chain-link bracelet, a watch through the crowd of real estate brokers, politicians, artists and wannabes."

Ron Kirk arrives amid the cacophony of flashbulbs and television cameras.

The same Jeffs who gathered their artist friends to paint a huge mural on the wall over the wraps around Club Clever to the Art Bar (promotional value "Hot" and the same Jeffs who, in the name of a good P.R. gig, have

not a politician. "He was always selling something," he says. In 1981, the summer before his freshman year at Texas Wesleyan, it was subscription to a local magazine published by Fairchild, parent company of Women's Wear Daily.

Weeks into his freshman year, Jeffrey was living the double life of college and party. He was in college by his senior year in college, "he did the same thing," he became known, was making \$300,000 a year in commission and driving a BMW he paid cash for.

Longtime friend Mike McCormick recalls the days when Jeffrey was covering New York, Los Angeles and Dallas, staying in the best hotels, attending the best parties. He was well known, well liked. "He was a real success story," says Mr. McCormick, who now works as a retail partner for Charter Properties, a real estate development firm.

"It was on a fast track," Jeffrey says. "I wasn't meant to be rubbed to the hospital complaining of chest pains. That's the alarm sound."

Barely four years out of college and Jeffrey was in a heart attack. The doctor who said it was triggered by a viral infection to Acetyl Plus, which was a new thing. "No more. No Acetyl. No coffee, no tea, no chocolate. You are in a risk. If you're another one, your heart will explode."

In 1990, he was ready to settle down. He had been living in New York and was looking for a way to get back to Dallas. He called Mr. McCormick.

"I said, 'I want to get into the restaurant business,'" recalls Mr. McCormick. "He was raising some capital and I said, 'You don't need to do that, the risk is too great. You need someone with an existing deal.' I suggested he call Swaney. I said, Swaney has all this space and, as flamboyant as he is, he has a captive audience. He calls Mr. McCormick.

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Jeffrey, a Club Clever regular, knew Jeff Swaney as "this young guy with this wild club." Jeff knew Jeffrey Yarbrough as "the Women's Wear Daily guy who brought in all this great business."

Jeff Swaney had already split up the Clever space when he opened the Art Bar as a party space for his friends' work. Jeffrey Club Clever," says Mr. Yarbrough. "She takes their place on either side of the mayor, who begins by thanking Mr. Yarbrough. Then he prates their restaurants ("one of the best examples of an urban revival" and "great idea, but he was bouncing off the walls," notes Mr. McCormick. "Jeffrey had a lot of fun. He was able to get them from A to B."

Party boy

"Parlon all this," Jeff Swaney says. "I've got a lot of fun. He was bouncing off the walls," notes Mr. McCormick. "Jeffrey had a lot of fun. He was able to get them from A to B."

And the spot is captured on Channel 4's hip on newscast.

Birth of a salesman

In the beginning, it was plans and posies.

The walk from the Delphi Group real estate offices around filled old Polger's Coffee cans with the best of his grandmother's plum and peach crops and then peddled their door to door throughout his neighborhood in Hunt. At the end of the day, he returned home pockets full of dollar bills.

The son of a traveling salesman who opens 100 to 150 days a week early on the road, Jeffrey learned, early on, to be a salesman. "I'm an entertainer and you have to be friends with your customers. If you don't, you're not going to be very far."

He peddled electric razors for \$7 a pop. He sold electric bicycles out of his parents' garage. Dorothy Yarbrough knew her only son would grow up to be a salesman, if not a politician.

suburb end up living the life of an urban pioneer.

He moved to Dallas not long after he graduated from Michigan State University in 1981. He was a sales guy at Hewlett-Packard by day and crisscrossed the warehouse parties and punk clubs of burgeoning Deep Ellum by night. In those days, Deep Ellum was a party, a party, a party. It was a collection of people who wanted to express themselves in a lot of different ways.

Mr. Swaney included himself in the collection.

In 1985, he left the corporate world and began looking for a way to make his money in a good party - into what he needed a new line of work. He began hosting parties in empty warehouses, side-stepping connection and never bothering to secure purchasing permits or pay taxes.

They became known as "outlaw parties."

He opened Club Clever with what he felt of his savings when it became clear he needed a permanent venue.

"We ended up in the Clever space because it was the only space that had running toilets and most of the roof intact," he says. "The rent was \$1,000 a month. I had a wild party more than a business in the beginning. So a business that could've netted a tremendous amount of profit netted basically a profit. It was all squandered. I got a new partner, we got a little more organized and that was back to Dallas. He calls Mr. McCormick.

"He also hired Todd Eckardt to be his financial adviser."

"When we collected money at the door, it would go into a drawer, off on the floor, and I'd get an idea. I'd get one here, five parties, ten here, twenties here, fifties and hundreds can go underneath the drawer."

"I said, 'Cool, that's a good idea.'"

Walking a tightrope

Paul Veoham, who underwrote the second (and current) Club Clever, was just out of college when he met Jeffrey Swaney in 1986.

"I've seen the development of Deep Ellum and I saw that there was a pretty thriving demand for Club Clever," says Mr. Veoham. "But they were having more fun with it than making a business out of it. I suggested that they run the business from a financial standpoint and he ran it for a while."

"The thing was never a raging success. I suggested that they invest \$7,000 in the club. It was just a good solid cornerstone to get them off the ground."

It was after Jeffrey Yarbrough joined the partnership three years later that the club began to feel self interest.

"Jeff could be big in real estate if he wanted to be honest. I'm not a failure," says Mr. Veoham, now a merchant banker. "But he enjoys playing a lot of cards in the first one he's capable of keeping up with all the time."

So Jeff Swaney - the Jeff who is never without his cellular phone, who is always in his car and walking out of the last 10 years of Jeffrey Swaney's life.

How did the product of a Detroit suburb end up living the life of an urban pioneer.

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