

Icon

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FLORIDA ICON

Florida Trend Icon

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When you look up the definition of an icon, you will find it described as someone who is widely admired and respected for their influence, their achievements and the enduring legacy they have created. That definition perfectly captures the individuals you are about to meet within the pages of this inaugural edition of **Florida Trend ICON**.

Tibor Hollo

 Category: 2010-2013

Tibor Hollo

PRESIDENT, FLORIDA EAST COAST REALTY; MIAMI

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This journey we started three years ago – to design an iconic building, probably the tallest south of New York. We'll have 1,010 feet in height, approximately 4.2 million square feet. To obtain the plans will take us three years, and it will take us three years to build it. I will be 91 years of age. I'll be a young man at that point.

My wife and I are married 45 years.

I arrived in 1956 to Miami. At 5 o'clock, they rolled up the sidewalks, and people disappeared from downtown. It was like a giant reptile, and the sun on Monday morning woke it up. Thanks to Castro, the intelligentsia of Cuba came to us and soon integrated itself in every strata of business and professional and economic life. We can thank the Cuban community that really started to move this city.

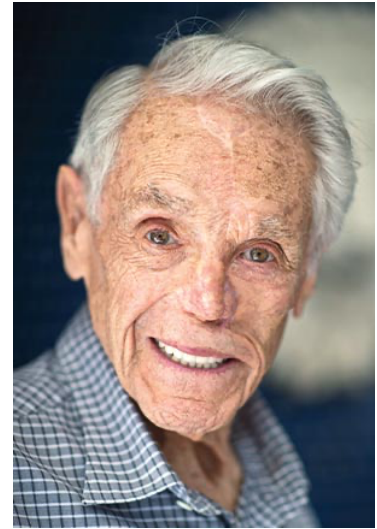
I'm doing my thing.

I only build one at a time so I can concentrate on the quality of the building. I managed in the last 55 years to build about 62 million square feet.

I had squamous cell and basal cell cancer, and they had 18, 19 operations on my face. Actually, they removed my nose. You love me with it, or you don't like me with it. It makes no difference. If you love me, you have to love me with it.

I was born in Hungary. My parents moved to France during the war. I was 6 years old. The Germans came in and picked up my whole family, and we went to a camp called Drancy and from there they took us to Auschwitz, separately, not together. I was about 14 at that time. My mom was killed, and my dad survived the war. I thank heaven for every day.

I finished my education, which was architecture.



Any opera I love. My all-time favorite is Carmen.

About five years ago I took my whole family to Budapest. That night was the last night of their opera performance in Budapest. So that night we arrived, we had to go to the opera. I don't know how my grandkids liked it, but to me it was good.

I do calisthenics. I do some weights, and I do aerobics. I do a machine called VersaClimber. That's a tough machine. I do 20 minutes on that.

I usually drive a car 10 or 12 years. I currently have a Lexus that looks like brand new, and it's 10 years old. It has about 40,000 miles.

Forty-five years we are in the house. This is a fairly steady neighborhood.

Nobody is bulletproof. I went through this nine times since 1949. By now I feel it when it's coming, and I pull back my horns. We established a criterion, and we don't like to borrow. We borrow 50% or maximum 60%.

We have so far 13 people who retired from the company after 30 years. In 62 years, I had three secretaries. My longest tenure is a fellow whose father worked for me. The son started before the father retired after 30 years, and the son is with me 38 years.

I look for honesty and loyalty in people, and that's it. I made up my mind a long time ago when I was a general contractor that people will make mistakes and I, the boss, the owner, have to be able to afford their mistakes. They will make mistakes. I will make mistakes.

French, Hungarian, German, Spanish, English, Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, I have a modicum of Polish and a modicum of Japanese. When I went to the Jesuit school, we learned Latin and ancient Greek. That helped me tremendously to adapt to languages. The Latin especially because it's so well-organized a language with declensions and conjugations. The English language is like a breeze. It's like nothing to learn.

I worked the first day I got (to the U.S.). People were waiting, especially for young people. And they said, 'Would you like to work?' I didn't want to tell him I was an architect. He didn't look like he

wanted an architect. But I wanted to work. So I said I'm an engineer. It was a curtain factory, and I did the packaging. So I made some money – 45 cents an hour.

You cannot do it alone. You have to have your people on your side. You have to be nice to them if you want to have the same respect from them. Financially, I learned to be very conservative, not to overborrow because there are always ups and downs, and you can bet your bippies the cycles will be coming. It's important that businesswise, as in your life, you live within your means. You may not get to be the richest man in the world, but you will be the most content person.

Editor's note: Hollo died in 2024 at age 96.

Interview by Mike Vogel

Photo by Nick Garcia