

# The Two-Minute Commute

## The Hunt

By JOYCE COHEN SEPT. 14, 2017



Dr. Robert J. Cerfolio is all about efficiency.

So when Dr. Cerfolio, a surgeon, planned his move to New York, he told his real-estate agent he needed to be within walking distance — preferably no more than four blocks — of his workplace, NYU Langone Health.

Dr. Cerfolio, often called Cerf, was coming from Birmingham, Ala., where he had been chief of thoracic surgery at the University of Alabama Hospital. (He performs non-heart chest surgery, primarily of the lungs and esophagus, including robotic surgery.)



In the winter, he began preparations for his new position as chief of thoracic surgery and inaugural director of the Lung Cancer Center at NYU Langone's Perlmutter Cancer Center. Dr. Cerfolio, 55, was unfamiliar with the neighborhood, on First Avenue in the 30s, at the edge of Murray Hill.

He and his wife, Lorraine, had lived in New York for a year during some of his medical training, in the early 1990s. "We wanted to have children and didn't think New York was ideal for a young family," he said.



They spent more than 20 years in Alabama, but four years ago, Lorraine died of cancer. Dr. Cerfolio's parents still live in New Jersey, where he grew up; two of his three siblings live in the Northeast; and the youngest of his three sons just started at Columbia University. So now it made sense to return to New York City.

Though Dr. Cerfolio prefers to own, renting seemed feasible for the moment. "I'm still learning about the area and not ready to commit to a long-term place just yet," he said.



He knew he wanted at least two bedrooms, so his sons could visit. He wanted a good view, a washer-dryer, an excellent gym and outdoor space where he could exercise in the sun — all within blocks of the hospital.

“I am not going to throw away my valuable time sitting in the car or stuck on a subway,” he said. In Birmingham, his drive to work took just 14 minutes in the early morning hours; the same trip home, in traffic, consumed an hour.

Last winter, the hospital referred him to Steve Hallerman, an associate broker at Citi Habitats, for help with the hunt. Mr. Hallerman, familiar with what was available in the immediate area, nudged Dr. Cerfolio’s four-block range up to 10 or more blocks. And one Sunday, Mr. Hallerman took him out to see some options.

“The budget was \$8,000, \$10,000, \$12,000, whatever,” Mr. Hallerman said of the monthly rent. “He didn’t know what he would get for his dollar. It is like buying a car: I will show you a Volkswagen and a Tesla. He was unfamiliar with Manhattan, and I wanted to give him a feel for different buildings.”



Dr. Cerfolio rejected some buildings partly because they had unimpressive gyms. One building's demographic skewed too old. Another's skewed too young.

He liked a four-bedroom with two balconies at the Future, a condo, for \$12,000 a month. "I thought if my kids come, they could have a private room," he said. But the view wasn't ideal, as it was partly obscured by neighboring towers.



At \$9,000 a month, a beautiful three-bedroom on a low floor at the Abbey Condominium, a former church parish house near Stuyvesant Square, had no views and lacked amenities. And in any case, Dr. Cerfolio's taste tended toward modern buildings. He also didn't relish a 20-minute walk to work on cold winter mornings.

But just north of the hospital, on First Avenue, the American Copper Buildings were rising: two copper-clad towers connected by a skybridge, in the shape of a crooked "H." Dr. Cerfolio loved the unusual exterior, gleaming in the sun.



Although construction was still under way, Mr. Hallerman later visited the buildings and "knew this was perfect," he said.

Dr. Cerfolio scrutinized the website and visited in the spring. The West Tower was already open for renters, while the East Tower won't be ready for leasing until later this year.

He chose a two-bedroom, two-bathroom unit — one of three, out of 761 units, with a terrace — for \$14,100 a month. The view is of the East River and Queens in one direction and the Empire State Building in the other.

His new home is far smaller than his Alabama residence, but the transition was not difficult. "My kids were out of the house and my wife had passed away, so I was looking forward to a new phase," he said.

The building amenities, including a pool and gym, should be ready later this month, according to the developer. Until then, Dr. Cerfolio has been working out on his terrace nearly every morning.

The building has smart elevators, so his wait for an elevator is brief. And his efficiency in getting to work is unparalleled.

"The median time is two minutes and 20 seconds," he said. "I can go in under two if I go really fast."