

What REBNY Did for Me and My Firm

And can do for you and yours—kudos all around as we gather to party!

In the commercial real estate brokerage industry, there are many qualities that are common among the very top producers: having a passion for the business, specialization, hard work, integrity, positive thinking, being able to successfully manage time and setting goals. Another characteristic common to the top brokers in our industry is their ability to effectively network. After all, this is a relationship business.

People generally work with people they know and like. Meeting someone face-to-face is significantly more advantageous than speaking to someone on the phone numerous times. There are many opportunities to network in our industry, as there are several trade organizations that hold multiple events each month. The more you get out and interact with participants in the marketplace, the more quality relationships you will build and the more successful your career will be.

Throughout my career, I have been active in many different trade organizations and have always made networking a significant component of my annual brokerage business plan. Networking can take the form of having breakfast, lunch or dinner with a client or a potential client; attending a conference or a seminar; or attending an event sponsored by one of these many trade organizations. In 2010, I chalked up 283 such events, or more than one per business day on average. Clearly, this aspect of my business plan is something that I focus great attention on, as business opportunities always seem to be generated from these interactions.

While there are many wonderful trade organizations out there, one of the best, and one of the most beneficial and productive for me and my firm, has been the Real Estate Board of New York.

This week, REBNY is celebrating its 115th Annual Banquet, so I thought it appropriate to recognize the tremendous work that the board does on behalf of our industry. It also goes without saying that the personal success achieved by Paul Massey and me, and the success of Massey Knakal, would not be close to what it has been without our involvement in REBNY. The

hundreds of solid relationships we have made and the knowledge we have obtained through our active participation in the organization have been priceless.

Our involvement in the Real Estate Board of New York began right from the start of our careers. In 1984, Paul and I began reading all of the trade publications, and it became apparent that REBNY held a prominent position within the industry. We immediately became members and, shortly thereafter, noticed that REBNY had a Sales Brokers Committee. As two young brokers who wanted to sell buildings for a living, joining the Sales Brokers Committee became an early objective for us.

Like today, it was very prestigious and very difficult to become a member of REBNY's various committees. For instance, the Sales Brokers Committee allowed only two members from each firm. At that time, Coldwell Banker Commercial (which was the predecessor company to CB Richard Ellis) had about 60 office leasing brokers but only five investment sales brokers, including Paul and me. Fortunately for us, the other three sales brokers at CB were not members of the committee.

We immediately contacted a gentleman named Jack Hill, who was in charge of admissions for the various committees. Jack explained to us that in order to become a Sales Broker Committee member, you had to have a track record of sales transactions. Given that we were new to the business, we put our plans of joining the committee on hold until such a track record was established. A year later, having closed a dozen or so transactions, we made our formal applications to join the committee. We wanted to be on the committee more than anything due to the sales brokerage legends that were members at that time. We could only imagine what it would be like to have lunch every month and rub shoulders with the likes of people such as Henry Hart Rice (whom REBNY's Most Ingenious Deal of the Year award is named after), Louis Smadbeck (whom REBNY's brokerage recognition and lifetime achievement award is named after), Dick Seeler, Sidney Rosenthal, Lewis Kaye,

Earle Altman, Eugene Hegy, Allan Riley, Cy Wolfson, Jonathan Miller, Jim Houlihan, Vin Carrega, Leslie Garfield, Bill Judson, Bob Shapiro and dozens of others that I apologize for not mentioning.

After submitting our applications, we hounded Jack for weeks as we awaited word. It was a truly joyful feeling when we found out that we had been approved for membership. Regular attendance of Sales Broker Committee lunches and events followed, which led to wonderful and lasting relationships with other committee mem-

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bers. As time has gone on, Paul and I have made other rewarding relationships with our fellow sales brokers through involvement on this committee. We feel very fortunate to count among our friends Darcy Stacom, Bill Shanahan, Peter Hauspurg, Brian Ezratty, Scott Latham, Richard Baxter, Ron Cohen, Jon Caplan, David Lebenstein and Woody Heller, all of whom we met through REBNY. All of these relationships have led to many business opportunities over the years, but more importantly, have created rewarding friendships.

While involvement with the Sales Brokers Committee was my initial involvement with the organization, over the years I've become active in several other of REBNY's committees, including having served on the Economic Development, Seminar, Arbitration and Transportation committees. I have also served on the Board of Governors since 2000 and on the Executive Committee since 2004. My capacity, particularly on the BOG and EC, has afforded me the opportunity to witness firsthand the incredible amount of work that the board does on behalf of everyone in our industry.

We are very fortunate to have Steven Spinola serving as REBNY's president. Steve's background of having worked in city government made him an excellent candidate for the position in 1986, when he

left the Koch administration to join REBNY. Since then, Steve has been a leader in our industry from a number of perspectives. He is a thought-leader who is always on the cutting edge of new policy or legislation that could impact our industry. He is a great communicator who clearly articulates REBNY's positions through his numerous writings, and has an uncanny ability to shepherd industry leaders, with often pronounced egos and disparate perspectives, to emerge with a unified voice. Add to this his dexterity with respect to city and state legislative leaders and we have an unparalleled captain steering REBNY's ship.

To be sure, Steve is backed up by a highly competent staff. Bill Auerbach, chief financial officer; Mike Slattery, senior vice president for research; and John Doyle, senior vice president for government affairs have each been at REBNY for many years and have made tremendous contributions. Their collective knowledge of issues impacting New York City's real estate industry is unsurpassed. Recent additions to the staff include James Whelan, senior vice president for public affairs, and Angela Sung, senior vice president for management services and government affairs. They each bring a wealth of experience to REBNY and will enhance its ability to serve our industry.

And I would be remiss not to mention the tremendous work done by Eileen Spinola, senior vice president for education and brokerage services, and Jeanne Oliver-Taylor, vice president for brokerage services, whom we all see at almost every REBNY event, including the many monthly committee meetings, which are so beneficial to committee members. In order to make these meetings as successful as they are, Eileen and Jeanne are supported by a wonderful staff.

Rounding out the executive staff are Maryann Aviles, vice president for membership and publications; Carol Van Guilder, vice president for urban planning; Brian Klimas, assistant vice president and chief economist; Nicole Lesson, director of communications; and Amanda Wood, director of new media.

In addition to having a tremendous executive staff, REBNY is also lucky to have über-broker Mary Ann Tighe of CB Richard Ellis as its chairwoman. Mary Ann has brought her energy, dedication and multiple talents to the board and has done a wonderful job lead-

ing the organization since her appointment in 2010.

The efforts of all of these people have been focused on one thing: making the industry better for each of its participants.

With all that the Real Estate Board of New York has done for our industry, I am happy to wish them congratulations for a job extremely well done on the eve of their 115th Annual Banquet, which is a celebration of all REBNY members, with particular acknowledgment of six special New Yorkers who are also REBNY members. Leslie Wohlman Himmel of Himmel + Meringoff Properties is receiving the Bernard H. Mendik Lifetime Leadership in Real Estate Award; Jeffrey Gural of Newmark Knight Frank is receiving the Harry B. Helmsley Distinguished New Yorker Award; and Andrew J. Singer of the Singer & Bassuc Organization will receive the Louis Smadbeck Broker Recognition Award. Other award winners this year include Leonard Boxer of Strock & Strock & Lavan, who will receive the Kenneth R. Gerety Humanitarian Award; Frank A. Freda of Cushman & Wakefield, who will receive the George M. Brooker Management Executive Award; and, last but not least, David Brause of Brause Realty Inc. will receive the Young Real Estate Man of the Year Award. Congratulations to each of these award winners, who richly deserve these recognitions.

Clearly, I personally owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Real Estate Board of the New York for all it has done for me and for my firm. I encourage any of you who are not REBNY members to consider joining and becoming active. It will be one of the best moves you could make to enhance your real estate career.

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Robert Knakal is the chairman and founding partner of Massey Knakal Realty services and in his career has brokered the sale of more than 1,125 properties, having a market value in excess of \$7 billion.

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