

## **A LOCAL CHAMPION**

*Pauline Larsen interviews Danny Klempfner, Toronto CREW's founding president*

Danny Klempfner may be best known as the founding president of Toronto CREW, but kick-starting the organization was just her first step.

Apart from being the first-ever president for a demanding two-year term, she served another year as president in 2002 and co-chaired the 2004 CREW Network convention committee that brought 800 CREW delegates to Toronto. She served as sponsorship director for a number of years, too, and was the first community outreach director on the Board.

Today, she says, after nine years, she is taking a year off.

“Gratefully, this year, I am retired!” she laughs.

Klempfner's decade-long relationship with Toronto CREW started in an unexpected way. Perhaps ironically, the initial seed of an idea for the Toronto chapter of CREW was germinated by a man, reminisces Klempfner.

“A male colleague was invited to speak at the CREW conference in Seattle in 1995 and came back full of praise for what the organization was achieving,” she recalls. “He was knocked out by how amazing CREW was.”

With support from CREW's outreach director in San Francisco, Klempfner and three other Toronto-based real estate women kicked off not only the first Canadian chapter, but also the first CREW chapter outside the US.

“We three got together and each invited another one or two women that we knew in the industry,” she remembers. “And because we were the first non-US group, we had to establish our own events, bylaws and strategies. There were no hard and fast rules to guide us.”

That very first Toronto CREW event, a presentation on going it alone in the real estate business, was a roaring success, with 55 women turning up.

Says Klempfner: “I remember thinking: we're on to something!”

Soon, the chapter launched a portfolio of events, including the annual golf tournament which has become Toronto CREW's signature event and in 2007 raised an estimated \$85,000 for charity.

From the beginning, a key consideration was how best to contribute to the community. Although the founding members didn't want men to feel excluded from the organization, it was nonetheless decided that the chapter would actively focus on initiatives that empowered women or girls.

“Those original values have shaped the thinking for the past decade and I believe they are still bearing fruit today,” says Klempfner.

And she's right. Toronto CREW still enjoys a solid partnership with the Canadian Women's Foundation. The Toronto CREW Foundation was set up in 2006. From those core ideals, Toronto CREW has launched mentorship programs, scholarships, and Career Days for young women. Chapters have been formed in other Canadian cities like Calgary and Vancouver.

"The essence of Toronto CREW is that it has legs, but it also has heart," explains Klempfner. "It's not just about doing the deal."

She's modest about her role in shaping the values of Toronto CREW.

"CREW just needed a local champion, a Toronto champion," she says.

Klempfner says that the lessons she learned as president of Toronto CREW developed her business acumen, honed her entrepreneurial skills and helped her understand the challenge of starting an organization from scratch.

"There was no infrastructure, no systems and no governance protocols," she remembers. "But what we did have, from the very beginning, was credibility."

It's a foundation that Toronto CREW has built on ever since.

She may be taking a sabbatical from Toronto CREW, but her role as president of S&H Realty Corporation isn't likely to give her much more free time although it does indulge her great professional passion: retail.

It was through retail that Klempfner found the real estate industry.

Klempfner's mother, who worked for a large development company, suggested that she meet with the shopping centre manager at one of their projects. Inspired by the world of shopping centres, she set her sights on making it her career.

"What's not to like?" she laughs. "You're always in shopping centres, and going for lunch is part of the job!"

After completing university, she recalls, it was a struggle to get into the retail business but she eventually landed a position as a trainee in the retail division of Bramalea Limited, a real estate company.

She paid her dues, working hard to gain experience in shopping centre management, leasing, administration and marketing. But when her employer announced that Klempfner would be transferred to Calgary, she made the decision to set up shop as a retail leasing consultant, notching up experience as a tenant rep and mixed-use projects specialist focusing on multi-faceted developments like office buildings.

One of Klempfner's strengths is that she combines a generalist's breadth of knowledge, thanks to exposure to the full range of retail disciplines, with the specialized understanding of an expert.

"Today, I spend a lot of my time working in the public healthcare sector, developing retail strategies for hospitals, for instance," she explains. She has found a real niche in the public sector, finding ways to help hospitals generate revenue through retail programs.

"But increasingly, I find that my work is about change management and putting teams together to accomplish a wide range of goals such as property management and marketing and to provide our healthcare clients with a one-stop shop network of services."

To revitalize, Klempfner heads off to her cottage north of Toronto where she indulges her love of cycling and golf. When she's in the city, down time takes the form of plays, film festivals and concerts – and maybe a spot of shopping!

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