

REAL ESTATE HORIZONS

Pauline Larsen interviews TCREW 2006 President Marta Lewycky

Marta Lewycky's term as president of Toronto CREW may be drawing to a close, but her passion for the organization and its initiatives continues to grow in leaps and bounds.

For Lewycky, that passion found a particular outlet in broadening horizons for young women in the commercial real estate industry. This year, Toronto CREW launched two of its three new CREW initiatives aimed at attracting and nurturing young women in the commercial real estate industry: CREW Careers for high school students, and scholarships for university students. The third initiative, professional mentorship, will be launched in January 2007.

Toronto CREW awarded three scholarships in 2006 and Lewycky anticipates this number to grow to five in 2007.

"These programmes are very close to my heart," she explains.

Lewycky brings to the presidency a sharp lawyer's mind and an eye for detail. But she admits that her zeal for the real estate industry came by fluke, rather than design.

Lewycky's career path kicked off with a BA degree from Concordia University in Montreal. Her choice of history as a major points to her curious mind and attention to detail. She followed this with an LLB from the University of Ottawa and in 1985, commenced her articles with respected Toronto law firm McCarthy & McCarthy.

Real estate law was a compulsory rotation during her articles, and one that she put off as long as she possibly could.

"I thought I'd find it boring," she laughs. "And then I discovered I loved it."

She found she had a flair for real estate law, and its intriguing world of surveys, architectural drawings, and micro-detail.

"For me, both the law and real estate were about sleuthing and that cinched my career path," says Lewycky.

In 1998, Lewycky, by then a partner at McCarthy Tetrault LLP, was contacted by a colleague who'd gotten wind that a women's real estate network had been established in Toronto. What Lewycky found appealing was the multi-disciplinary approach that Toronto CREW had adopted, allowing her to broaden her knowledge of the real estate sector and its professions.

"I realized that we were all quite niched in our respective professions, and Toronto CREW offered a unique platform for education and exposure," she adds.

Lewycky was elected onto the Toronto CREW board in 2000 and hasn't looked back.

The beauty of Toronto CREW, she says, is that the network plays a truly collaborative and supportive role for women in real estate. It's a role that can evolve over time, meaning different things to different members at different times in their lives.

“Toronto CREW isn’t just about attending functions; in fact, that’s seldom enough. The network is certainly about building business and professional contacts. But it’s also about friendship and life-long relationships,” she says.

In 2005, Lewycky further broadened her exposure to the commercial real estate industry when she accepted a position as Vice President of Legal Affairs at First Capital Realty, one of Canada’s leading owners, developers and operators of supermarket-anchored shopping centres. She’s also a frequent speaker at continuing legal education and industry conferences and even did a stint as a columnist for the Toronto Star.

Looking forward, Lewycky reckons the Canadian chapters of CREW are enjoying an ever-growing presence on the North American real estate horizon.

She believes that the first-ever CREW Convention held in Canada, in Toronto in 2004, made a real impact and strengthened relationships both across the border and between the Canadian chapters.

“And it’s the kind of input that CREW is looking for,” she says.

Lewycky is looking forward to the role of Immediate Past President, which perhaps allows her a little more time for reflection and contemplation. As Past President, she’ll be working closely with 2007 President Carolyn Laidley-Arn and 2007 President-Elect Andrea Kraus, both people with whom she has developed a strongly collaborative working relationship over the past few years – especially during their shared experience on the Convention.

“The Immediate Past President is supposed to act as the wise sage and provide guidance to the new President. I’ll be around as long as they need me,” she says.

Overall, she says, Toronto CREW is entering a new stage in its life. It’s larger, more diverse, and more active than ever before.

“We’ve matured as an organization. The first stage was successfully completed with the CREW Convention. Now we’ve launched our initiatives to support young women. What will be next?” she asks. “It’s up to us to define it.”

It’s one of the reasons that Toronto CREW is currently conducting a member survey, to assess what’s succeeded in the past, and what members are going to need in the future.

Lewycky balances the cut and thrust of real estate law with loads of family time, and it’s no surprise that she tries to travel as much as possible with children, Daniel (12) and Sophie (9), both locally and abroad.

“Travel is a way to enrich our lives, and expand our horizons,” she says.

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