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Executive of the Month: Pollak of Evergreen Insurance sees tremendous growth for the firm

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Alan Pollak, Evergreen Insurance

Rockland County, NY The New York Real Estate Journal recently sat down with Alan Pollak, COO and partner at Evergreen Insurance (www.trustevergreen.com), an insurance agency that focuses solely on investment real estate, for a question and answer session.

Q: Tell me about Evergreen Insurance.

A: Evergreen Insurance was founded in 2009 by Izzy Green and Sol Eisenberg. While they began the firm as a generalist insurance agency and had built a decent-sized client base by 2011, they made the decision to sell their book of business and start fresh within the niche market of investment real estate insurance. It was a big risk at the time, but they took the plunge and it paid off. Today, Evergreen Insurance is a leading national insurance agency for investment real estate, and our portfolio includes everything from small rental units to large apartment buildings, shopping centers and commercial buildings.

Q: What differentiates Evergreen Insurance?

A: Three factors, all related to our real estate niche:

1. We live and breathe real estate. We speak the same language as investors; our staff understand the due diligence process well; and banks and mortgage brokers love to work with us for that reason.
2. There are thousands of insurance companies and programs out there, each with a different specialty and appetite for risk. We know exactly which insurance companies are good for each type of real estate risk. This cannot be said about a generalist. If you're selling insurance to pharmacies, warehouses and churches as well as real estate, you can't possibly know the insurance market as well as an agency that is solely focused on real estate.

Shown (from left) are: Izzy Green, CEO;

Alan Pollak, COO; and Sol Eisenberg,
partner and co-founder

3. We take clients with a few thousand units and we revamp their entire insurance portfolio and write custom policies for them. One recent example is a client who rehabs rental apartments and has more than 50 insurance policies with different expirations dates and coverages. The processing for each building they purchased and sold was a nightmare. We put them on a single reporting form insurance program specifically designed for rehabbers and flippers, one on which all adding and removing of properties could be done online.

Q: Is there a minimum size policy one needs to use Evergreen Insurance?

A: No, we write anything that is investment real estate, down to a single-family rental property. A significant part of our small business division is below \$2,000 in premiums. Izzy likes to say, "We don't look at premiums, we look at clients. A customer is a customer no matter how large or small the premium is. If it fits our niche, they will get the highest level of service."

Q: 2016 was an exciting year for Evergreen Insurance with a 60% growth to your book of business. Tell us more about Evergreen's rapid growth.

A: In 2016, Evergreen experienced very dynamic growth in both direct sales and offices. We moved to a larger office across the street and are now looking to open another office in the Midwest. We also closed on a successful insurance acquisition in 2016 which is a very exciting path to be on.

Q: What's the biggest challenge when selling investment property insurance?

A: The balance between offering the client the cheapest insurance, yet making sure they have great coverage. Most clients don't think about claims when purchasing insurance, yet when they do have a claim on an item they declined to purchase coverage for, the claim will be declined.

Izzy Green (left) on site at a claim in Texas

Q: When did you join the company?

A: I joined Evergreen as an equity partner in early 2015. Izzy and Sol liked the 15+ years of experience I had in my career as an acquisition and due diligence analyst for a real estate investment fund and my business experience as an owner of a successful payroll service. It's been a great ride and I'm happy I made the move.

Q: What trends do you see in the market for real estate insurance?

A: Insurance premiums are down and that's a good thing, but do expect to see an increase in premium during the second half of 2017 and in 2018. I would not be surprised if premiums increase as much as 12%-15% over the next 18 months.

Q: What do you consider the largest driving force of Evergreen's success?

A: Our team, both on the executive level and the team on the ground. Hiring the right people is key, and we spend enormous resources finding the right talent.

Q: What's the single most important feature you look for in an employee?

A: Good work attitude – it makes all the difference. I can train someone for anything technical and how to do the job, but I can't train or force a good attitude.

Q: What is in the cards for the next 12 months?

A: Acquisitions. We purchased an agency in 2016 and we plan on closing on a few more this year. With each acquisition we gain access to new local markets around the country.

Q: Can you give us an example of how you were able to deliver better than any other insurance agency?

A: I'd love to. One that stands out recently is a garden style apartment complex with 3,500 units in San Antonio, TX. We saved our client \$250,000 in annual premium, and coverage was superior. This is a typical example of how we do better than your Main St. agent selling real estate insurance. A week after we bound the policy, the client had a large fire in one building with a few million dollars loss. Izzy and Sol were on a plane the next day and met the insurance company at the damaged building; payout was fast, and there was no need for a public adjuster because our claims department acted as one. You do not get that from a Main St. agent. We saved the client a ton of money on this claim because there was no need for him to spend a few hundred thousand dollars on hiring a public adjuster.