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2020 Year in Review: Jeffrey Munoz, NorthMarq Capital

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Jeffrey Munoz
Vice President
NorthMarq Capital

What was the most difficult part of working during the pandemic of 2020? The hardest part was not being able to collaborate in person with my mentors and peers at the office. Being in the office and discussing deals with co-workers has always been the best way to leverage expertise and get to the best solution for each deal scenario. Others in mortgage banking like to “fly solo” when originating business and are accustomed to the individual mindset. In my opinion, collaboration will always lead to better results. The team approach allows each deal to receive the attention our clients appreciate and hopefully learn from.

What was your greatest professional accomplishment or most notable project,

deal, or transaction in 2020? I originated a refinance loan through Northmarq’s Freddie Mac program on a 100-unit garden-style apartment complex. The long-term rate allowed the client to pull some cash out and lock in a low rate at the treasury’s lowest point this summer. The process went smoothly and our client was very satisfied with the results.

What aspects of working from home have you enjoyed most? Flexibility. When I say flexibility, I mean beyond the ability to work in sweatpants. Flexibility means the ability to wrap my home life with work life. When I used to travel into Boston, the 45-minute train commute meant I would be a pedestrian for the day. That complicates my schedule if I have to appointments outside the city, or an emergency came up causing me to travel places not easily accessible by public transportation. I would have to grapple with coordinating rides, walking long distances, and allocating much of my day if I needed my car. Working from home now means I can save commuting time, participate in my home life, and still work the same amount, if not more.

What are your predictions for commercial real estate in 2021? From the capital market’s

perspective, I would be a rich man if I knew where rates were going. I believe rates are at their lowest levels with a higher probability they will rise rather than fall. In the short term, we will continue to see volatility in rates but they will likely remain flat until more clarity comes on the direction of the economy. Recent economic indicators have shown mixed signals, which keep institutional capital providers hesitant to invest and lend at volumes seen in prior years. The office market may be the biggest unknown as we've seen how major markets continue to struggle with a growing supply of sublease space. The successful implementation of vaccine protocols could help speed up recovery, but the case can be made that companies may change their office footprint if their employees prefer working from home. While this will likely change the overall size of office space, developers and savvy investors may look to reposition their available space to accommodate demand for different uses. Market shifts tend to open opportunities in ways we have not yet seen.

What is the best advice you have received, and who was it from? Never sacrifice reputation for a deal. It can take years to build up a reputation and a few moments to lose it. My mentor Michael Chase told me when I was first getting started as a mortgage banker. This lesson can be applied in many aspects but when originating new business, reputation in the marketplace is key. A good reputation means having integrity for both clients and capital sources. Being honest and forthright will lead to clients building trust in me even if that means not winning the business. One can overcome losing a deal for not being the most competitive, but one cannot overcome distrust from borrowers and capital providers in the market place. Boston is a relatively small market and once it becomes known you are willing to say anything to get a deal done, you lose ranking with your business partners. Being known as a thorough and knowledgeable banker is hard to gain and easy to lose.