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2022 Women in Commercial Real Estate: Becky Bedwell, Cottonwood Group

September 30, 2022 - Spotlights



Becky Bedwell
Senior VP & Head of Development

What advice would you offer to women getting into the CRE industry?

Always follow your gut, use your voice, and take care of yourself (while still being a team player). It's all too easy to get lost in the shuffle in the commercial real estate business—so work hard to get a seat at the table and keep working to make yourself heard. It's also important to learn from those around you, especially mentors and leaders. Observe, listen, and engage in conversation with those individuals, but also be willing to challenge industry convention when you feel strongly or have ideas. Different perspectives have real value in a traditionally male-dominated industry.

What has been your biggest challenge and how have you faced it?

I think the transition from student to teacher is a difficult one for professionals in many industries—and that was definitely the case for me. It took both time and perspective to acknowledge my hard-earned experience and recognize that I have a great deal of knowledge to offer. That challenge and that journey is something I am always aware of; it fuels my passion to mentor younger people coming up in the industry. As a quiet leader, I'm also regularly challenging myself to be more vocal and to share my development perspective in an investment-focused organization.

What trends will dominate your industry in the coming months?

The market is still somewhat in a state of flux, but in multifamily, addressing what residents want and which amenities are appealing in a post-pandemic environment will continue to be valuable—as will the ability to adapt to market volatility and supply chain issues. One of the most interesting trends I see coming for commercial real estate is fewer trends! By which I mean, the rules are changing around us in real time. From investments and acquisitions to design and construction, we are going to see more creativity, more innovation, and less concern about formulae and tradition.

In the past year, what project, transaction or accomplishment are you most proud of?

My clear highlight and personal point of pride has been bringing Echelon Seaport online, with all its amenities fully up and running. We opened during COVID and were understandably faced with some operational limitations to certain amenities. Finally, being able to fully introduce this landmark project to our residents and the market has been enormously rewarding—and I'm so proud of the extraordinary work that our team put in during some very challenging times to bring the project to fruition.

Who is a woman leader you find to be inspiring and why?

While she's unfortunately been in the news lately for tragic reasons, I'd have to say Queen Elizabeth. When I think about not only the steady leadership she has displayed, but the fact that she's been able to do that over the course of seven different decades, it's awe inspiring. She has endured immense change while remaining steady at the helm, and made incredibly volatile circumstances seem manageable. I also admire her ability to take a broad look at any problem, while also being willing and able to dig into the details. She's iconic: the definition of a strong female

leader.

Are you part of any CRE organizations? How have they helped your professional development?

I am a proud member of NAIOP, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association, and have greatly benefitted from their resources, advocacy and knowledge sharing over the years. I have benefitted a great deal professionally, both as a student and as a mentor, from informal professional support networks locally that have facilitated the kind of mutual engagement, support, perspective, advice and insight that can only really come from trusted fellow professionals. The fact that that advice is not company- or project-specific has made it all the more valuable to me both personally and professionally.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540