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89** | **OVER
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Executive of the Month: Question and answer session with Joseph Aquino of Joseph Aquino Commercial Real Estate Services

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Joseph Aquino,
Joseph Aquino Commercial Real Estate Services

Manhattan, NY The New York Real Estate Journal (NYREJ) recently sat down with Joseph Aquino, proprietor of Joseph Aquino Commercial Real Estate Services for a question and answer session.

NYREJ: You mentioned you started traveling the world early on in your career. How did this come about?

Aquino: From the very beginning I travelled nationally which included all the major cities in the U.S. and Canada. I traveled often to Las Vegas, Chicago, L.A., Miami, Montreal and Toronto. But it wasn't until I met my wife, Suzanne, in 2002, who is from Northern Ireland that my love affair really took off, both for my wife and for my excitement of flying into a new city. In the first three months of our romance, we flew to Belfast to see her family and then headed off to London and Zurich, where her company had offices. The London office was located near The Liverpool Train Station in the Financial District. On these early trips, I would tag along, and during the weeks leading up to the trip, I spent time making back-to-back appointments lining up new customers to meet, like Penhaligon's, Toni & Guy, Rachael Riley, Jimmy Choo & Patrick Cox all of which I did deals with in New York City. Some of the other companies I visited were Gina Shoes, Pringle of Scotland, Matthew Williamson and Paul Smith.

NYREJ: What other European countries have you gone too?

Aquino: After London, we headed onto Italy, where I visited Italian companies like Atelier Aimee the bridal maker located outside of Florence, Cesare Paciotti in Milan, Sermonetta in Rome and Piero Guidi in Urbino all of which were more tenants I did deals with in New York City.

NYREJ: Do you speak another language?

Aquino: I have been studying Italian since 1996 when I first went to Buenos Aires. On that trip the customs official asked me for cinque peso (5 pesos) before entering the country and I didn't understand what he meant and when the custom official looked at my name "Aquino" he said something under his breath. I didn't need to comprehend the language to know the customs official was laughing at me because I had a Latin name and I didn't know simple Spanish. On my return to New York I decided I wanted to learn another language and chose Italian since both sets of my grandparents were from Italy.

Aquino and his wife, Suzanne, during one of their trips to Italy

NYREJ: Studying another language can be difficult, have you ever done a deal in Italian?

Aquino: I am modest to say I am fluent in Italian, but I am convinced it could be better.

However, I do admit I did an entire deal with the three brothers at Piero Guidi conversing and writing in Italian since the brothers knew very little English.

NYREJ: After Italy, where else did you go in Europe?

Aquino: I made it to Paris and met Kusmi Tea which I did a deal with along with Berluti who I worked with and other tenants like Kenzo, Cartier, Dior... On other trips I made it to the South of France, the Cote D'Azur, also known as the French Riviera. It's gorgeous and so civilized. You always feel like you are in a James Bond 007 movie when you are there. And when you are there, you must visit Monaco, another gorgeous country, which is a short car ride away. In Monaco, I have been courting another great international retailer, this one called Niki de Paimpol a swimwear designer. They are a lovely couple, he is from Germany and she is from Italy. She is the designer and he the businessman. I have also been to Vienna, where I would visit customers like Frey Willie, and then travel to other places like Munich to canvass new tenants, and have some schnitzel and a stein of beer!

NYREJ: How about Africa, have you been to any countries there?

Aquino: I went to Marrakesh for a conference. They have some of the finest and most luxurious hotels in the world. You see a lot of camels on the outside and plenty of caviar on the inside. When I was there a few years back, it only had one luxury store (Louis Vuitton) and I spent a lot of time (and fun) negotiating with the Arabs in the Souk. You can negotiate for an hour and get your price after the merchant follows you through every store and then when you

return to the hotel and you laugh at yourself because you still paid way too much Dirham—the name of their currency.

NYREJ: And Asia, have you been to any countries there?

Aquino: I went to Singapore several years ago where I met Caruso menswear. I immediately brought them back to NYC a few weeks later—and leased them an 11,000 s/f store for them at the old Spanierman Gallery space on East 58th St. The space faces the rear of The Four Seasons. The direct flight to Singapore was over 21 hours from NYC, however I did a stopover with my wife in London for a few days to take the edge off the exhausting trip.

NYREJ: And Mexico, what about Mexico, have you gone there for business too?

Aquino: In between the Europe jaunts, I would get adventurous and go to other places like Mexico City, where I met the CEO of Cinepolis Luxury Cinemas, the fourth largest movie chain in the world. I brought them back to New York and showed them every cinema and development site that the NYC market had to offer.

NYREJ: You recently started your own firm, tell us about that experience?

Aquino: Yes, it is a new firm, but every day I still do the same old tricks I have done for the past 30 years. Except, now, I am my own boss which can be good—however I can be a very tough boss on myself...I like to surround myself with Millennials. They are great because they are very personal, smart and technical savvy—all elements I need and thrive on. They are always showing me new ways to communicate. That's the name of the game, getting the message out clear, concisely and QUICKLY! Which leads to my firm's tag line. "Let us lease your property quickly!" Too many brokers just plan "catch-off-the-sign." Not us! We go right to the source, whether we have to travel to Europe to their offices, or have their personal e-mail. We have it, and utilize these resources when necessary.

NYREJ: I see you have a new web site that covers all of your services. Can you tell us about that?

Aquino: Yes, I recently designed the new website which talks about the services of my new firm. Besides retail, it discusses other elements like office and industrial leasing too. I have been providing these services for years and recently secured over 100,000 s/f of industrial space in Long Island City for a customer and I have done countless showroom/office spaces in Manhattan. For most of my career, I have been known for retail which suits me fine, but the new firm will be more aggressive in getting the message out that there are other services available too.

NYREJ: We noticed you have a blog and yours discusses travel?

Aquino: Yes, I decided that instead of doing a blog on real estate, or of a political nature, instead I dedicated my blog solely to my travels in and around the world that resulted through my real estate business. It is a combination of some funny stories like hearing the sounds of cow bells and mooing over the public announcement system when you take the tram from your plane to the terminal at Zurich airport, or how there is a 150-year-old fig tree in Sao Paulo, Brazil the size of our oak trees that overhangs an outdoor restaurant. I also bring the viewer into some of my meetings, in which one was with the world's greatest merchant, Mohamed Al Fayed at his office at Harrods in London (when he still owned the company).

NYREJ: You have a secret, can you tell us about?

Aquino: Yes, I am the founder of The Secret Broker Society, a fraternity of international brokers I put together to boost my deal making in New York, where I can channel my customers through this group around the globe. The group has been meeting secretly for seven years and deals have been done quietly. Our Chicago broker was instrumental in finding a space for Buccellati and the Los Angeles broker did several deals with children's wear tenants; LOL Kids and Monnalisa. The Atlanta broker did a deal with children's tenant Pink Chicken and the L.A. broker brought Perrin of Paris to New York a deal that was done along Madison Ave.

NYREJ: What trips do you have planned this year?

Aquino: 2017 year plans to be a stellar year for my travels. I am planning to go to Barcelona,

Amsterdam and Finland, all great towns and I will be searching new and exciting tenants to bring back into New York City.

NYREJ: Joseph, thank you for your time. Would it be proper to say Arriverderci!

Aquino: Yes, that is the polite and formal way of saying good-bye in Italian. And to you I would like to reply. Ci vediamo a presto! Which is an affectionate way of me saying “See you soon!”

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