



2021 Women in CRE: Christine Coletta, Hirschen Singer & Epstein LLP

November 02, 2021 - Spotlights

Name: Christine Coletta

Title: Partner

Company Name: Hirschen Singer & Epstein LLP

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

I represented the team of partners who are developing The Atrium at Sumner, a 100% affordable housing building for senior citizens in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn on land owned by the New York City Housing Authority. It was a complex financing structure that included bond financing from the New York City Housing Development Corp., a New York City Housing Preservation Department Senior Affordable Rental Apartments (SARA) subsidy, a credit enhancement from Wells Fargo and an investment from Wells Fargo in exchange for low income housing tax credits (LIHTC). The Atrium is being designed by Studio Libeskind to Passive House standards and will be another example of how affordable housing can be beautiful, functional, and green.

Tell us a thing or two about you that is NOT on your resume or LinkedIn profile?

When I'm not in the office, I spend most of my time in the beautiful Catskill Mountains. I love exploring the trails, restaurants and villages that make up this part of New York State with my husband and daughter. I'm also an avid fan of sled dog racing, in particular the Iditarod, which I have followed online for years.

How do you contribute to your community or your profession?

I serve on the boards of three organizations that directly and indirectly make New York a more vibrant and healthier city. The first is The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among underrepresented communities. I also serve on the board of directors for Big Reuse, Inc., a nonprofit organization supporting community-based environmental initiatives through the reuse of materials, work training, and community composting. Big Reuse seeks to combat climate change and create a green economy with living wage jobs through social enterprise. Lastly, I serve on the board of NYHC, a nonprofit affordable housing policy and advocacy organization that supports decent affordable housing for all New Yorkers.

How do you keep your team motivated despite conflicts and obstacles?

Communication is key. This has always been true, but it's been especially important as we've worked remotely. I have regular check-ins with my team and this helps to address issues and concerns before they become conflicts. The most important thing is having the right team to begin with. I'm proud to be part of a collegial, close team of attorneys who all like each other and feel passionately about the importance of this work and our clients. We're all committed to affordable housing and the critical role that having a safe, clean affordable place to live makes in someone's life. This core mission really helps us stay motivated and focused on the larger goals.

How do you advocate for your fellow women in real estate?

As an attorney for real estate developers, I'm fortunate to have opportunities to literally advocate for women in real estate. I've represented Type A Projects, a Women-Owned Business Enterprise (WBE), on several real estate deals and I'm involved in advising other minority- and women-led groups who are entering the field of affordable housing development.

I also take seriously my role in continuing the supportive environment cultivated by amazing, brilliant and dedicated women who have come before me in the field of affordable housing. I'm a member of the Fordham Real Estate Institute mentorship program and I also mentor women who are starting their careers in real estate or considering a career shift.

What books or social media influencers would you recommend to other women?

"Never Split the Difference" is a great book about negotiation by Chris Voss, who's a former hostage negotiator for the FBI. It's a completely different approach to negotiation than what is traditionally taught in law school and applicable to so many professional and personal situations.

"The Color of Law" by Richard Rothstein is a really important read for anyone in real estate. It provides historical insight into the role segregation has played in how cities and neighborhoods were developed.

Why should women consider a career in commercial real estate and related services?

Commercial real estate encompasses a lot of things, including affordable housing, that shape how people experience life and build communities and relationships. These are fundamental concepts that have long-reaching effects into every part of society. It's vital that women have seats at the tables where these decisions are being made, because women will be living in the communities that result from these decisions. The industry is constantly evolving and we've seen how tremendous benefits have come from the multitude of ideas, life experiences, and voices that industry professionals, especially women, have to offer.