

THE REAL DEAL

NEW YORK REAL ESTATE NEWS

January 1, 2016

NYC's in-house powerhouses

Behind the scenes with the agents who are in the quiet-but-high-stakes game of selling Manhattan's priciest condos



In February 2012, sales agents Dan Tubb, Jeannie Woodbrey and Emily Sertic brokered what could be considered the deal of a lifetime. They locked in a buyer for a sprawling penthouse at Extell Development's One57 — for a record-breaking \$100.5 million.

The purchase, which was made by an undisclosed buyer, made headlines. But if you haven't heard of the trio of brokers who represented Extell, you're not alone. Although they sell massive amounts of

real estate, onsite brokers routinely toil behind the scenes.

"We're not the brand; the building is the brand," said Liz Unger, a senior sales director at Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group who is currently heading up the sales team at 111 West 57th Street, the ultra-skinny tower being developed by JDS Development Group and Property Markets Group.

Unger was previously the sales director at Hines and Alexico Group's 56 Leonard, where she sold a \$47 million penthouse in 2013. "We're the Oz behind the curtain," she said. "It's not the Liz Unger show, it's the 56 Leonard show."

Unlike other brokers, onsite agents are typically dedicated to selling one project, whether they're working in-house for a developer or for the new development marketing arm of a brokerage like the Corcoran Group or Douglas Elliman.

Thanks to an influx of new condo inventory hitting the market — and what some describe as a potential glut of high-end inventory — onsite agents are playing an increasingly important role for developers. And the stakes are serious, given the exorbitant price tags that developers are looking to achieve.

"The expectations and the standards are very, very high," said Jill Mangone, sales director at Zeckendorf Development's 50 United Nations Plaza.

Collectively, New York City's priciest 12 condo buildings have a massive projected sellout of \$20 billion, accounting for a stunning 44 percent of the total asking prices for all 200 condo projects in the works in Manhattan, according to a recent analysis by analytics firm CityRealty. (The analysis excluded One57 and other projects where more than half the units have already closed.)

Not surprisingly, landing a gig selling one of the top projects with a brand-name developer is a coup for agents, especially in today's market, where brokers are fiercely

competing to get into the lucrative new-development world. Mangone, for example, said securing a job at a Zeckendorf project “was like getting accepted into Harvard or Yale.”

Buckworth, too, said working on 520 Park was a huge resume booster. “After working at a prestigious building like this,” he said, “you can pretty much look at anything you want.” But veteran new-development agents say the work isn’t for everyone. Onsite agents typically stay with a project for years, from early in the design process through the building’s pre-marketing push and then during actual sales.

The payoff takes a while — commissions come only when closings begin. Though terms vary, successful agents are well compensated for their patience. While the commission for onsite agents is typically less than the industry standard on a per-unit basis — it’s more like 1 percent rather than 3 percent — some are salaried or receive financial incentives during the sales process to make up for the fact that months could pass from the time a unit goes into contract until it closes.

The current style of new development marketing was pioneered by Louise Sunshine, whose eponymous firm was acquired by Corcoran parent NRT in 2002. Sunshine trained a tight-knit group of (mostly) female brokers who are still in the business today. The firm she founded, Corcoran Sunshine, which is headed by one of her protégées Kelly Mack, is the 800-pound gorilla that dominates New York’s development marketing world. Other major players include Halstead Property Development Marketing and Douglas Elliman Marketing.

Corcoran Sunshine’s **Woodbrey** — who has sold nine buildings, including Related Companies’ Time Warner Center, and is one of Louise’s “Sunshine girls” — said onsite agents juggle a diverse array of clients.

“I could go from selling to a pig farmer from [Middle America] to a hedge-fund guy an hour later. You have to be a chameleon,” said **Woodbrey**, who is currently selling **Bruce Eichner’s tower at 45 East 22nd Street**. “The personalities coming through your door are nonstop.”

Today’s ultra-luxury projects draw discerning buyers who have choices in front of them. “We’re not selling one-bedrooms; we’re not even selling different floorplans, really,” said Louis Buckworth, who is leading sales at Zeckendorf’s 520 Park Avenue. “Every single person who walks in is going to be spending a minimum of \$20 million.”

Below *The Real Deal* looks at the agents selling out some of New York’s priciest new development buildings and how they navigate their high-stakes sales jobs.

Richard Wallgren *432 Park Avenue*

More than any other New York City sales agent, Richard Wallgren’s Midas touch has graced the crème de la crème of Manhattan new developments. He is currently heading up sales at the 96-story 432 Park Avenue, which is being developed by Macklowe Properties and the CIM Group and has a total sellout projection of \$3.1 billion, the highest in the city.

But Wallgren, Macklowe’s head of sales and marketing, got his biggest break back in 2005, when he was brought on as sales director at Zeckendorf’s 15 Central Park West, the iconic, Robert A.M. Stern-designed condo that set a new bar for luxury towers (and prices) in New York.

Wallgren, who did not return calls for comment, and his team sold \$2 billion in the building, which opened in 2007. And he personally turned a neat profit there when he sold his one-bedroom condo for \$3.5 million in 2013, nearly double the \$1.8 million he paid in 2008.

But before he led sales at some of the city's toniest addresses, Wallgren was an investment banker specializing in commercial mortgages at the now-defunct Wall Street firm Salomon Brothers. Following a stint at Stribling & Associates, he joined Brown Harris Stevens. From there, he became sales director at the Time Warner Center and then landed the gig at 15 CPW.

In 2011, developer Harry Macklowe hired Wallgren to market his condo conversions at 150 East 72nd Street and 737 Park Avenue.

Wallgren obviously did something right because Macklowe came knocking again when it came time to sell 432 Park, his glitziest tower to date. As of last month, 70 percent of the 106 units were in contract, including the priciest — a penthouse that was reportedly purchased by Saudi retail magnate Fawaz Al Hokair for \$95 million.

But in the face of slowing sales, the developers divided up full-floor units on five floors, carving out smaller apartments with lower price tags. Elliman was also recently brought on to help unload remaining units — which are priced between \$16.9 million and \$76.5 million — in the home stretch.

In November, the developers received a certificate of occupancy, paving the way for closings to begin.

Deborah Kern *220 Central Park South*

Developer Vornado Realty Trust has kept a tight lid on what's happening at 220 Central Park South, the highly-anticipated development that's costing the REIT \$5,000 per square foot to build. But behind the scenes, Corcoran Sunshine's Deborah Kern is selling the ultra-luxury condos there at breakneck speed.

In November, Vornado CEO Steven Roth, who is notoriously press-shy, said more than half of the building's 118 units had gone into contract since sales launched in March.

Kern, a U.K. native, came to real estate from the arts, having previously worked as a marketing director in the music industry. She joined the Corcoran Group in 2006 and was the firm's No. 3 agent in 2014. That year, after Wallgren shifted his focus to Macklowe's 432 Park, the developer tapped Corcoran to market 737 Park. Kern landed the project with fellow broker Hilary Landis.

Then, this past spring, she moved over to Corcoran Sunshine and was tapped to lead sales at 220 CPS, another Stern-designed tower that has a total sellout of nearly \$3 billion. She is working with Corcoran Sunshine's Norma-Jean Callahan. During Vornado's third-quarter conference call, Roth said 14 of the units in the building sold for more than \$50 million. A \$100 million penthouse is reportedly in contract, and hedge funder Ken Griffin is said to be looking to combine units to create a \$200 million pad. *TRD* previously reported that a Qatari buyer was eying a \$250 million spread. "Our margins are superb," Roth said in November.

Dan Tubb *Greenwich Lane*

Growing up in Texas, Dan Tubb envisioned a career as a youth pastor. “I grew up going to church and playing football, and I was going to go to seminary,” he said. Instead, he discovered an interest in musical theater in college at the University of Austin, which drew him to New York and, ultimately, real estate. Tubb’s attendance at Times Square Church led to a chance introduction to fellow parishioner Leslie Wilson, then a senior vice president at Related. (Their dentist made the introduction).

In 2006, Related hired Tubb to lead sales at Astor Place, a 39-unit co-op at 445 Lafayette Street. He moved to Corcoran Sunshine in 2007.

To date, Tubb said he’s worked on seven new developments representing 370 units and \$3.5 billion worth of sales. Projects ranged from the eight-unit boutique condo at Madison Equities’ 57 Irving Place in Gramercy to another Madison Equities project, the 47-unit Chelsea Modern. But his “breakout role” was leading sales at Extell’s One57. Tubb, who left Corcoran Sunshine briefly while selling One57, is now back at the firm and heading an eight-person sales team at the Rudin family and Global Holdings’ Greenwich Lane, the redevelopment of the former St. Vincent’s Hospital. The project has a total sellout of \$1.7 billion.

The onetime actor said selling real estate is improvisational, as is a complete mastery of the product. Greenwich Lane is particularly complex in that regard, since it has five buildings with distinct finishes and styles. Since sales launched in 2013, 90 percent of the project is sold, Tubb said. “When you’re selling buildings that are two or three years away,” he added, “it’s important to talk about those construction milestones and celebrate them as part of the sales process.”

Louis Buckworth *520 Park Avenue*

Former nightclub impresario Louis Buckworth is selling some of the most expensive real estate in New York, but the 32-year-old didn’t get his start in real estate until the financial crisis hit.

Buckworth, who was living in London at the time, saw the value in New York property prices in 2010, particularly compared to London. “When you looked at the prices, New York looked cheap,” he said. “It became clear that a lot of the people I had known from my circle abroad were interested in buying or investing in the U.S.” Trained as a lawyer (he never practiced), Buckworth initially joined the Corcoran Group but jumped to Brown Harris Stevens, where his stepmother Arabella Greene Buckworth is an agent.

In 2012, he became the envy of aspiring brokers everywhere when he helped close the sale of a triplex penthouse at the Plaza for \$25.4 million. Buckworth brought the buyer, Christian Candy, who developed London’s One Hyde Park. A year later, Candy put the unit on the market and is now asking \$49.95 million. But Elliman’s Noble Black, along with brothers Tal and Oren Alexander, now have the listing. Buckworth said when the Zeckendorfs asked him to lead sales at 520 Park, “there [wasn’t] any other building I’d say yes to.” Prices at the condo, yet another designed by Stern, start at \$16.2 million and rise to \$130 million for the triplex penthouse, which is asking \$10,489 per foot.

Because 520 Park, with just 33 units, is not a huge building, he said the sales process is more methodical and referral based. Buckworth, who grew up in Australia and, in addition to London, lived in Istanbul and South Africa, relies on his international pedigree

to find common ground with buyers.

“Having that international reach,” he said, “helps [me] to understand how people see New York.”

Roberta Axelrod *50 West*

A onetime art history and historic preservation student, Roberta Axelrod may seem like an unlikely promoter of shiny, new condos. But the 34-year veteran of Time Equities defies that notion; to date, the director of sales for developer Francis Greenburger has been involved in the conversion or sale of over 10,000 units across 125 projects. Axelrod, who went to Barnard and later earned a master’s degree at Columbia University’s School of Architecture and Urban Planning, said her first job out of school was working as a HUD counselor — giving advice to low- and moderate-income New Yorkers on buying, renting, obtaining mortgages, handling foreclosures and dealing with credit issues. After landing the Time Equities’ job, one of her first assignments was working on the Clinton Hill Co-op Apartments, a 1,200-unit residential complex that Time Equities converted into co-ops in 1984.

At 50 West, Axelrod leads a 12-person team that handles the marketing and sales for the 191-unit building. Prices start at \$1.9 million and rise to \$18.3 million for a penthouse. Time Equities has raised prices 20 times since sales launched in June 2014. While Axelrod said she tends to focus on big-picture design and staff training, no detail is too small. “I personally check every kitchen’s layout for every little thing — drawers, hinges going in the right direction,” she said.

Loretta Shanahan-Bradbury *30 Park Place*

Loretta Shanahan-Bradbury’s path to Lower Manhattan, where she is currently sales director at Silverstein Properties’ 30 Park Place, contained unusual twists and turns. The self-described Navy brat grew up in Connecticut, Hawaii and Virginia.

As a criminology student in college, she taught in a medium-security prison. And after graduation, she became a flight attendant for the now-defunct Eastern Airlines. But in 1995 at the behest of a friend, Shanahan-Bradbury earned her real estate license. Her first job was working as an onsite-leasing agent for Milstein Properties’ four Liberty Residences buildings, located at 200, 377 and 380 Rector Place as well as 99 Battery Place. In 2005, she moved to Corcoran Sunshine and has been there ever since.

To date, Shanahan-Bradbury said she has sold over 1,000 new development residential units.

The 157-unit 30 Park Place, another Stern design, is 70 percent sold and closings are expected to start this year. Shanahan-Bradbury previously worked on Manhattan House, the 500-unit condo conversion by developer O’Connor Capital Partners. She also sold 15 Broad, 15 East 72nd Street and 10 West End Avenue.

“I don’t need notoriety,” she said, referring to the relative anonymity of working on-site. Asked if she’d consider resales, Shanahan-Bradbury said, “This is what I do. It’s what I do best.”

Emily Sertic *111 Murray Street*

Over the past 12 years, Emily Sertic has kept a foot firmly in the resale market even as she has sold new developments. The strategy has served her well.

At One57, for example, her sales team, which was led by Tubb, was ahead of the curve when it began selling Extell's condos off of floorplans in 2011.

"I was able to comfortably speak to what \$7,000 or \$8,000 per foot looked like at 15 Central Park West or prime buildings," she said. "It helped to support sales at very high numbers."

Sertic, a former model who was named Miss Teen Canada in 1982, said she "tripped into real estate" as a business school student in Canada when she began working with a local developer. She moved to New York in 2004 and worked in commercial real estate for two years before landing at Related.

She then did a quick stint doing resales at Corcoran Group before joining her former Related boss, Susan De França, who left to head up Douglas Elliman Development Marketing.

To date, Sertic said she's sold more than \$2 billion worth of real estate.

At 111 Murray, a 139-unit condo developed by Witkoff Group, Fisher Brothers and New Valley, she is heading up a team with Noble Black, Darren Sukenik, Raphael De Niro and Peter Zaitzeff. The latter three worked together on Witkoff's 150 Charles with Elliman's Madeline Hult Elghanayan and Compass President Leonard Steinberg. "When you have a great team and a great machine, a lot of developers will maintain that great synergy and move that forward," noted Sertic, who added that 111 Murray is 60 percent sold after sales launched in June.

Liz Unger *111 West 57th Street*

The summer of Unger's junior year at the University of Massachusetts, she eschewed a job scooping ice cream with the majority of her friends. Instead, she worked as an assistant to her best friend's sister-in-law, a real estate agent. "I didn't make a dime the whole summer," she recalled, but noted that by October "when the commission checks came in" that had changed.

After graduating with a degree in real estate finance, Unger landed a job at Related as part of the in-house leasing team at Carnegie Park, the 275-unit rental that the developer converted into condos in 2014. After several years, she moved to Elliman, working in Battery Park City and the Financial District. In 1999, Unger got a call from Louise Sunshine who, she recalled, told her: "Liz, I'm doing a building Downtown and I heard you're good." She's been at Corcoran Sunshine ever since.

To date, Unger estimates she's sold more than 900 units, or roughly \$3.5 billion worth of real estate, in 18 buildings that include 56 Leonard, 10 Bond and 173/176 Perry. The abovementioned \$47 million penthouse she sold at 56 Leonard shattered Downtown records at the time. "It was unheard of," she said. At 111 West 57th, Unger is marketing 65 luxury condos with a projected a sellout of \$1.45 billion.