

**women in real estate 2009**

FEATURING BARBARA ALESİ, KATHLEEN DEEGAN DICKSON, JUDY LYNN SIMONCIC AND DOMENICA LEONE

Four women attorneys of Forchelli, Crowe, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo, Cohn & Terrana**ba Barbara Alesi**

Partner
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The biggest challenge facing the real estate industry in 2010 is ...

Calendar years 2008 and 2009 presented very unique challenges to commercial real estate. The financial meltdown, tightening of the credit markets, precipitous drop in the stock market and the resulting slump in the overall economy created a "perfect storm" for the commercial real estate markets.

Early calendar year 2008 showed the beginnings of a slump in commercial real estate activity, which manifested itself, early on, in the slowing down of redevelopment (i.e., applications for zoning variances, special use permits, and the like). The ensuing financial meltdown, precipitous drop in the stock market and overall slump in the economy, buyers vanished, existing sales stalled and new sales came to a virtual halt.

On the landlord/tenant side of things, the poor economy and the resulting rise in unemployment figures have had a tremendous negative impact on business, generally, and tenants' ability to keep up with the lease expenses (rents, real estate tax escalations, common area charges, etc.) all of which were calculated in better economic times. Many landlords were forced to renegotiate lease terms on a temporary or permanent basis in order to keep tenants.

Many economists speak about the "other shoe to drop" if the current economic situation persists or worsens in 2010 and commercial properties go into foreclosure, and commercial landlords are unable to refinance existing mortgages when they come due.

It is unclear, at this time, what calendar year 2010 portends for the commercial real estate market. If the overall economy and, in particular, the credit markets improve, the fears for commercial real estate's future will abate. If, however, the current economic situation persists or worsens, 2010 may present some very difficult challenges for commercial landlords and tenants.

I concentrate my practice in corporate and commercial matters, including mergers and acquisitions, commercial real estate transactions, private placements of securities and mortgage and asset-based financing.

I have served as chair of the North Shore Animal League America President's Advisory Board and as a member of the Advisory Board of Chicago Title Insurance Co. I have served as an executive board member of the National Association of Women Business Owners-LI chapter and on the membership committee of the Executive Women's Golf Association, Long Island chapter. My article, "Potential Tax Pitfalls," was published in the New York Real Estate Journal in 2008.

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How has the need to create a more sustainable environment influenced the way you do business?

The nature of real estate development has changed dramatically over the last several years, especially here on Long Island, with the new recognition that growth and expansion must be sustainable in order to make sense. This renewed focus has led us to work with our clients and local government officials to develop innovative and creative projects which both enhance the communities in which they are located and provide the necessary economic return for the developer. Almost all of my residential development clients focus on orienting developments closer to transportation hubs and downtowns to encourage walkability, and on clustering units to preserve open spaces. The more pioneering of my clients have incorporated sustainable features such as the use of geothermal energy to heat and cool residential units, or solar power to reduce energy costs. We have become adept at working with local officials and community leaders to develop strategies that will provide desperately needed workforce housing, which is so necessary for the future of Long Island, by providing density bonuses or other incentives in areas that can sustain that growth.

The "silver lining" in the cloud of the current economy is....

The time is perfect to pick up some good real estate at great prices and start the government approval process. Land prices have come down, and if you have the equity, banks are beginning to lend again, and the interest rates are still very good. Local governments are unusually motivated to show that they are doing their part to get things moving again, and are willing to work with developers to encourage responsible, job-creating, tax-generating new projects and move them through the process quickly.

I concentrate my practice in the areas of real estate transactional matters, and, in particular, land use and zoning law. I have an extensive track record of success with and before municipal boards and agencies on significant projects throughout Long Island. Perhaps more importantly, I have a reputation for effectiveness and integrity in the pre-hearing meetings and outreach to municipal planning staffs and civic groups that are now a must in Long Island's current development climate. I am former counsel to the city of Glen Cove Planning and Zoning Boards, and currently represents many developers, property owners, corporations and private individuals in all types of matters involving real property transactions, zoning and land use.

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What Motivates Me to Succeed?

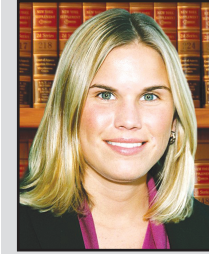
I was the first associate to be hired by the firm directly out of law school and the youngest attorney in the firm's history to be named partner. Making partner at a prestigious law firm is perhaps one of the ultimate achievements for any attorney to accomplish. When I became partner in 2002, it was by far the biggest accomplishment of my career—not only as an attorney, but as a woman. In the 17 years that I have been with the firm and specializing in land use and zoning, I have seen an increase in the number of women practicing in this field. I believe that this is not only a sign of the change of times but also recognition of women's achievements in what was previously a predominantly male area of law. I hope that my personal and professional achievements can provide a sense of inspiration to other aspiring young women attorneys who want to make the most out of their career.

How do I stay ahead of the curve?

The area of land use and zoning is continually evolving. In order to stay ahead of the curve, it is imperative that I keep abreast of the most current zoning cases and closely follow changes in local municipal regulations. With this knowledge, I am then able to assess each case and the issues presented by it at the earliest possible stage. Every case is different and it is very important for me to be able to assess each case and understand the issues in the context of the applicable rules and regulations. It is equally important to have the ability to listen and understand clients' objectives so that I can take the necessary steps to achieve the clients' ultimate goals.

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I started my legal career working in the Oyster Bay town attorney's office before joining the firm. I concentrate my practice in the areas of zoning, land use, environmental, municipal, and real estate law. I represents national franchises, Fortune 500 companies, national corporations, large real estate development companies as well as individual real estate developers in the development of both residential and commercial properties throughout Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

dl Domenica Leone

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What obstacles have you overcome to get where you are today?

In order to put myself through school, I worked full time, both in college and law school, which I attended at night. This ambitious schedule required a great deal of discipline both financially, socially, but more importantly in the use of my time. Allocating one's time is extremely important because there never is enough of it. Many sacrifices were made in order to complete my education and get admitted to the bar. Efficient time management has been extremely helpful to me in beginning my career and in providing efficient cost effective legal services to our clients.

What motivates you to succeed?

Working with attorneys that I admire and respect motivates me to succeed. In our law firm we have some of the best and brightest as well as most experienced land use attorneys. I have the chance to work with them on a daily basis and have seen firsthand how good practical lawyering can achieve results beyond even a client's expectations. The opportunity to practice alongside accomplished attorneys motivates me to constantly improve myself. I want to be proud of my profession and my participation in it.

Who has been the strongest influence on your career and why?

For the last five years I have worked directly for Jeffrey Forchelli who has by far been the biggest influence on my career. He is not only extremely knowledgeable in the area of land use and zoning but is creative and pragmatic in his approach to land use issues. These are the qualities which I believe make him such a talented attorney and successful managing partner. He has also taught me that diligence and client communication are essential to a successful legal career. Forchelli has been and continues to be an incredible mentor to me.

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I concentrate my practice in land use, zoning, and environmental issues related thereto. In such capacity, I have worked with partners in the firm on major projects for local and national clients. In addition, I have worked on contracts of sale and closings of title related to properties being developed.