

## COVERSTORY

# MINDING THE STORE

## Why property managers are essential for taking care of business



Courtesy of RIPCO

**NEW HYDE PARK PLAZA:** Clarion Partners' 130,000-square-foot shopping center is the latest property management assignment for RIPCO Management.

By **DAVID WINZELBERG**

Michael Korff is busy.

As the president of RIPCO Management, the property management division of the RIPCO Real Estate brokerage firm, Korff oversees operations at more than 2.7 million square feet of retail real estate in the New York metropolitan area that's occupied by over 700 tenants.

Needless to say, there's a lot to do. Korff and his staff must ensure the properties in his charge are clean and safe, maintaining proper lighting and landscaping, snow removal, and responding to any emergencies that inevitably pop up.

For Korff, a 28-year veteran in the property management field, those emergencies have included cars driving through store-

fronts, a blown transformer that knocked out power to the tenants, and a more mundane crisis.

"One time, a dental office called and wanted us to repair a broken dentist chair," he recalled. "We got them a vendor to assist them. We have a 24-hour phone number, and our managers are accessible by cell phone or email 24/7, 365 days a year."

For many commercial real estate owners, property managers are the conductors that keep everything on track and running smoothly. They also serve to limit liability and keep spaces occupied, ensuring that revenue keeps flowing.

"We keep everything leased, that's the important goal," Korff said. "We have 140 brokers, and a database of over 20,000 tenants."

Following the money and reporting on economic performance is another essential task. RIPCO Management employs a staff of CPAs and accountants to monitor financials, collect rents, pay vendors, identify possible cost savings, and more.

"An institutional property owner of a Long Island shopping center hired us, and we uncovered \$300,000 of annual revenue that wasn't being billed, substantially boosting the value of the center," Korff said. "We were also able to retrieve about \$500,000 in rent that was due but never billed."

RIPCO's latest Long Island property management assignment is New Hyde Park Plaza, a 130,000-square-foot shopping center on 9 acres owned by Manhattan-based Clarion Partners.

Another busy Long Island property man-

ager is Phillip Wachtler, who co-founded Farmingdale-based WK Equities with Dan Knopf in 2005. WK oversees the management of 1 million square feet of commercial property, which comprises office, mixed-use, warehouse and retail occupied by more than 100 tenants.

Assisted by a staff of 10, WK has a lot on its plate, conducting tours of the properties for prospective tenants, designing tenant spaces, overseeing buildouts, negotiating leases, and collecting rents.

"And then we're there every day with the tenants," Wachtler said. "We have a 24-hour hotline, and a tenant-request email service."

Like other property managers, Wachtler and his staff respond to myriad issues like leaky pipes, noise complaints, people parking in reserved spaces, and lost money

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in vending machines. They even had a call from an office tenant about killing a spider.

“We run our properties like a bed and breakfast,” he said. “People often spend more waking time in their place of business than they do at home, so we want their spaces to be clean, safe, and productive.”

Wachtler said his firm also tries to make it fun for his tenants to come to work. The WK staff puts flowers in the women’s bathrooms for Valentines Day and distributes bags of candy to the tenants on Halloween. Wachtler also planted a vegetable garden in one of the courtyards of his client’s 150,000-square-foot office building in Farmingdale.

“We get a list to the tenants asking if they want tomatoes, cucumbers, etc.,” he said. “I pick the vegetables, and the tenants come pick them up. It’s a nice community thing.”

For Rosaleen “Ro” Hance, property management is all-consuming. Hance, who’s been in the business for 37 years, is a partner with Mark Hamer in Melville-based Harvest Real Estate Services. The company manages some 500,000 square feet of commercial real estate, consisting of mostly office and industrial properties and one retail center.

Hance and Hamer managed office and industrial property for the Donald E. Axinn Companies and later for Brandywine Realty Trust, which had acquired the Axinn portfolio. They founded their firm Harvest in 2002.

Hance is tasked with hiring and managing all of Harvest’s third-party vendors, including landscapers, snow removers,



**MICHAEL KORFF: ‘We keep everything leased, that’s the important goal.’**

cleaners and anything else related to the properties. She also handles any emergency.

“I am the on-call person, so when the calls come in from tenants or from the fire alarm company anytime day or night, I have to answer,” she said. “It can be crazy, but you have to be available 24/7.”

And yes, it can be crazy. Hance once received a call from an office tenant about kids running around throwing food in the elevator and hallway.

“Turns out it wasn’t kids,” she says. “It was another tenant having a food fight. The tenant questioned that they were in-



*Photo by Judy Walker*

**PHILLIP WACHTLER: ‘We run our properties like a bed and breakfast.’**

involved, but I checked the security cameras and showed them.”

Some of Hance’s most difficult calls came from struggling tenants asking for help during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Those were tough phone calls,” she says. “But in most cases, we were able to defer their rents.”

Hance says her favorite task is being involved with buildouts of tenant spaces, where she interacts with architects, negotiates tenant improvement allowances, and oversees the work.

“I really enjoy the construction end and getting the spaces built out,” she said, adding that



**ROSALEEN “RO” HANCE: ‘It can be crazy, but you have to be available 24/7.’**

she also enjoys just interacting with the tenants.

That’s something Wachtler says is one of the most important parts of the job when it comes to property management.

“We’re the face of the ownership,” Wachtler said. “If we perform poorly, that reflects badly on us and ownership.”

Korff agrees with that sentiment.

“Maintaining relationships with tenants is critical,” he said. “Tenants are the lifeblood of these properties. Managing the centers so they’re clean and safe and attract customers is essential for the tenants to do business and grow.”