

Real estate groups look to up value for members

By YUDISLAIDY FERNANDEZ

As real estate associations turn the page to 2010, starting a new chapter under new leadership, the focus is on getting members more bang for their buck by offering more education, networking and marketing tools.

The Realtor Association of Greater Miami and the Beaches' commercial division is rolling out a Multiple Listing Service-like database for commercial properties, said Ronald Kohn, 2010 president of Realtors Commercial Alliance.

The association is to unveil the program, which has been used for about a decade in cities like Seattle, by midyear. The National Association of Realtors bought the program and the local chapter licensed it for South Florida.

"We are hoping it will become a primary tool for all commercial brokers," said Mr. Kohn, president of Kohn Commercial Real Estate. "Commercial real estate has always been more diffused. While there are some programs out there people have been using, some are geared towards investment properties. This will be a comprehensive database that will have every single property in Miami-Dade and will keep the history of the listing."

Workshops are also planned to get the various markets, such as industrial, retail and office, familiarized with the new listing service, Mr. Kohn said.

As the realtor association celebrates its 90th year, a big focus is to continue educating and updating its 12,000-plus members and the public on what's happening in the industry, says Terri Bersach, board chairwoman.

For example, to better service members in the county's northeast area, the association is opening offices in January at 1550 NE Miami Gardens Drive, Suite 400.

The group also plans to lobby on issues affecting the industry, such as opposing Amendment 4 on the 2010 ballot that calls for the public and not elected officials to vote on planning and zoning changes, said Ms. Bersach, manager of Coldwell Banker's Weston office. Also on the legislative to-do list is working with Miami-Dade County to ensure that surtaxes collected from commer-



Ronald Kohn: Multiple Listing Service one way association is offering its members more.

cial transactions are properly invested in affordable housing, Ms. Bersach explained.

Highly anticipated is the International Congress in November that will bring together real estate agents globally, she said, expanding local members' working relationships and client base. International investors were instrumental in moving Miami's housing inventory this year, making all-cash deals when many banks weren't lending much.

Meanwhile, the local chapter of Commercial Real Estate Women is launching the "Make It Happen" campaign to promote indirect networking to make deals in the challenging economy.

"What happens is you have to be willing to try new things and go that extra mile to get the deal done. You have to hustle," says Suzanne Amaducci-Adams, the 2010 president.

The commercial group, with a diversified membership of brokers, property managers, attorneys and interior designers, offers members access to experienced professionals who can advise and guide them, Ms. Amaducci-Adams said.

With deals becoming more complex in the distressed real estate market, asking other professionals how they've tackled similar transactions or what their experience was with a client is invaluable in today's market, said Ms. Amaducci-Adams, an attorney at Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod LLP.

Presentations on using social networking sites to foster indirect deal-making and industry roundtables are also planned, she said, to help the organization's 130-plus members and others stay informed and build deal-closing relationships.