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PROFILE Natalie Rakowski, managing director,
CORE Group Marketing

Rakowski loves the heart of the deal

By Maggie Hawryluk

Is it for the love or the money? For some professionals, the reasons for stepping into the residential real estate business can be mixed, but for Natalie Rakowski, the answer has always been for love.

"I always loved real estate, but I started this because people close to me — through being from Germany or surviving the Holocaust — weren't being treated justly," Rakowski, managing director and founding member of CORE Group Marketing, said. "I didn't do it for the money. It was more about wanting to help people."

Rakowski got her start in the industry overseas after the fall of the Berlin Wall prompted the German government to offer Holocaust survivors, or those whose family members were affected by the Holocaust, the chance to reclaim their property or obtain restitutions. Rakowski, whose father survived the Holocaust and met her mother at a displacement camp, felt very close

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to the cause and wanted to help people reclaim what was rightfully theirs.

"I thought it was quite unfair because a lot of the people were elderly, and they were far down the lists in waiting for their numbers to come up. The government said that if you were older and didn't want to wait for your number, you could get 30% of the value of your property in 1939," she said.

"I came up with this plan to review people's claims and buy them at the current market value. I had friends in real estate in Germany, so they were able to help me. We were able to give people money on the present value of their property, and then we renovated the properties and combined units."

Rakowski was born in Berlin, moving to the United States at the age of one when her father decided that America would be a better place for her and her older siblings to attend school. While attending NYU, she would help her father at his successful antiques business.

But it was the fall of the Berlin Wall that drew her into real estate straight after college. She threw herself into her mission, taking out ads in newspapers in areas that had large Jewish communities, negotiating deals and then traveling frequently to Germany to help renovate the homes. In fact, she said she still owns property in Germany and tries to visit the country often.

About four years after starting this venture, Rakowski became interested in real estate closer to home, and decided to earn her salespersons license. In 1993,

she started in the uptown office at Prudential Douglas Elliman and was making a splash as one of the firm's top-selling brokers.

"I worked all the time. I was working seven days a week," she recalled. "But I learned a lot during that time. That's why I've gotten to the point that I'm at now because I put in a lot of time in the beginning."

Soon Rakowski's love and talent for making old apartments new again caught up to her when she began working with sponsors who were renovating and reselling unsold shares in co-ops. Rakowski advised the sponsors not only on renovations and finishes, but also on marketing.

With this experience under her belt, her transition into new developments was fairly easy. Rakowski takes the hands-on approach when working with developers, staying on a project from beginning to end. From defining a neighborhood's market and demand, to helping a developer decide on finishes and planning launch parties and open houses, Rakowski prides herself for her multi-tasking skills.

"It stays really interesting because things happen at so many different stages," she said. "One building is always so different from the next."

When Rakowski heard that Shaun Osher, a fellow Douglas Elliman broker that was making a name for himself downtown, was planning to start his own firm, she knew she had found her next career step.

"When I heard he was starting his own company, I said, 'Sign me up,'" she said of CORE Group Marketing, which Osher launched in 2005. "People were courting both of us from other firms, but it always seemed like a side-step. It was a no-brainer. I had a lunch meeting with Shaun and I was on board."

Now, as managing director of the full-service boutique firm, Rakowski's responsibilities run the gamut of closing deals with developers, managing the project from start to finish and overseeing the other agents. And, as CORE's reputation is growing, so is Rakowski's already full plate.



Among the projects she's currently overseeing are Number 5, at 5 East 44th St, Loft 14, at 135 West 14th St., the highly successful Thread in Union City, NJ and a new Manhattan project that CORE is taking over from another firm which she can't talk about just yet.

"The market is always going to be interesting," she said. "[New development] is always going to be the interesting thing to do because it's all new."

As if Rakowski doesn't have enough on her plate at work, her personal life is jam-packed as well. The mother-of-two, with a new three-month-old, is busy with being a member of the school's Parents Association and class photographer.

"Being with kids is the most wonderful thing," she said.