



The Empress of Housing

With vast industry knowledge, boundless energy, and a tough-as-nails persona, Rella Fogliano is succeeding in the high-stakes world of local real estate development. **By Elaine Pofeldt**

Ask Pelham-based real estate developer Rella Fogliano what a typical day is like for her in the notoriously tough real estate development industry, and she'll tell you in her straight-shooting style: "I don't go to work every day. I go to war."

But it's clear that the high-energy entrepreneur doesn't flinch from maneuvering her team across the battlefield. A blond dynamo, Fogliano is the force behind a number

of well-known buildings in the New York Metro area, as founder of two related companies, MacQuesten Development LLC and MacQuesten Construction Management, which employ 15 people.

You've probably driven past some of her local projects. Those in Westchester include the firm's corporate headquarters at 438 Fifth Avenue, a three-story, 10,000-square-foot space in Pelham, which her team moved into in 2013 after gutting and rede-

signing the existing office space on the first floor. Her company is also developing The Modern, an 11-story, \$30 million affordable-housing/retail complex that broke ground in 2015 at 130 Mount Vernon Avenue in Mount Vernon. It has a target completion date of December 2016.

Fogliano also has put down stakes in the Bronx and Manhattan. In the former, MacQuesten has built complexes such as Palmer Court Homes, a 135-unit middle-income garden apartment, while Manhattan has the Tony Mendez Apartments, a project that encompasses two six-story buildings with 130 affordable units at

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116th and 117th Streets. Her two companies work in tandem on financing, designing, and construction management of both multi-family and commercial properties.

Fogliano isn't one to dally when she sees a good opportunity and is known for making rapid-fire decisions.

"I pride myself on giving a fast 'yes' or 'no,'" she says. "I don't usually sit on the fence, and I usually don't regret having said 'no' or 'yes' quickly. We can't really waste time in this business. Time can be your worst enemy."

She has used her fast-on-her-feet decision making skills to successfully navigate the complex transactions involved in the affordable housing sector, where developers must be both politically savvy and knowledgeable about relevant tax credits.

Growing Up in the Business

Fogliano, 55, learned the unwritten rules of the business early. From the time she was a 6-year-old growing up in the Baychester section of the Bronx, she often tagged along with her father, general contractor

Sabino Fogliano, to the construction sites where he built residential homes. When she was 17, she joined his business as a part-timer. "I was always working there during time off from school, holidays, summers," says Fogliano. "I guess I was a very low-paid intern."

Graduating from Fordham University with a double major in communications and French, Fogliano considered pursuing her interests in architecture and interior design. But when she graduated, the pull of working in her father's business proved too strong, so she decided to join him full-time in 1983.

It was in 1988, when her father retired, that Fogliano formed her original company, MacQuesten General Contracting, in Mount Vernon, where she continued to serve many of the clients she'd gotten to know at his firm. By the early 1990s, she began developing properties in the Bronx that her father's company owned. Aware that there was a shortage of affordable housing, she embarked on an existing 63-unit project at Hughes Avenue Crescent in the Bronx that she completed in 1996. By 2003, she had formed her current companies.

Fogliano started out with an insider's knowledge of the business, but she still had many obstacles to overcome, such as the discomfort some business associates felt working with a female developer.

"She is a woman in an industry with a dearth of women," says Joseph Apicella, who joined MacQuesten Development last year as managing director of development after 20 years at Cappelli Enterprises, a developer of properties such as The Ritz-Carlton, Westchester in White Plains. Fogliano's innate understanding of when to show strength and when to build others up has helped her get things done, he says.

She is also persuasive. Apicella remembers one recent meeting in which Fogliano needed government officials to give her the go-ahead for an affordable-housing project. She spoke with unflappable confidence about how it would benefit needy people in the community, he recalls.

"I'll never forget watching her performance that day," he says. "She won everyone over."

Fogliano also has to contend with

the many vexing situations that are part of the job for any developer. One of her most difficult challenges came while her company was building Claremont Park Apartments, on a site between Webster Avenue and Clay Avenue in the Bronx, she says. After breaking ground on the 98-unit apartment complex, her team discovered the sloping terrain included

not for the faint of heart."

Nevertheless, Fogliano's team was able to finish the project, which includes a daycare center and other amenities, in December 2007. "I always see completion—no excuses," she says.

The local business community has been taking note of what she's accomplishing. In 2014, Fogliano was named Developer of the Year by the



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both bedrock and water—features not usually seen at one location.

To continue the project, they had to build a costly 300-foot-long, 30-foot-high retaining wall on both avenues. Pulling that off required Fogliano to break the bad news about the site to her bank and an investor—and to pour more of her own money into the project. "You have to be very transparent with people," says Fogliano of her approach to dealing with such crises. "There's no hiding. This business is

New York Housing Conference and the National Housing Conference. The Business Council of Westchester selected her for its Women in Business Success Award in 2015.

Family, Food, and Inspiration

Outside of work, Fogliano spends a lot of time with family and friends. She and her husband, Joseph Breda, a former x-ray technician who is now a special-projects manager at MacQuesten Development, live a

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block from her mother in Eastchester. (Her father passed away last year.)

To relax, Fogliano enjoys working out in her home gym, doing Pilates, and weight training. She also loves curling up with a pile of industry magazines to get inspired with design ideas to discuss with the architects on her projects. "That's the kind of stuff that relaxes me. It's usually related to business," she admits. "I'm so grateful; I wake up every morning loving what I do."

Fogliano is emphatic when asked what her design sensibilities are. "Modernist, modernist, modernist," she says. "I don't believe in going back to the past. We live in 2016." She has a current outlet for her interior-design passion working on the lobby of The Modern in Mount Vernon. "We're working to give it a very industrial, cool look," she says.

Whipping up specialties like roasted chicken, ragù, and homemade chicken soup is another passion of Fogliano's. "My father taught me to cook," she says—though she admits that Sergio's Ristorante in Pelham makes a soup that can compete with her own.

Fogliano is also an avid restaurant buff, according to Rita Wyatt, a financial consultant at Wyatt & Co in Armonk, who has worked with Fogliano for 20 years and considers her a good friend. When the two women and their husbands dine out together, Fogliano always picks the restaurant.

"I say to her, 'Make reservations, and tell me where we're going,'" says Wyatt. "She loves to take the lead. She's always reading magazines and finding new restaurants she wants to try."

Another passion for Fogliano is the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, a New York City-based nonprofit that does workforce development. She is a governor at the organization, which runs a tuition-free trade school for 400 students. "I feel good about giving back to a nonprofit," she says.

Like many of the important things in her life, Fogliano learned about the need to give back from her father. "It's funny how life is one big loop," she says. ●

Elaine Pofeldt is a freelance writer whose work has recently appeared in Money, Fortune, CNBC and many other publications. She is author of the upcoming book The Million-Dollar, One-Person Business (Ten Speed Press).

**Cheers to you,
Jesse!**

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