

RELLA FOGLIANO INTERVIEW BY JOE ANUTA

Rella Fogliano is the head of MacQuesten Development, a construction company she founded in 1992. Her firm is based just north of the city, in Pelham, but Fogliano has been doing plenty of work in her home borough of the Bronx. Recently, she cut the ribbon on an affordable-housing complex in Crotona Park East, although her company builds market-rate apartments across the city as well. Fogliano is the second generation of her family to go into the construction business.

How did you get into real estate?

I can't say I was one of those people who knew exactly what she wanted to do, even after college. But I loved spending time with my dad. When I was as young as 6, my father would take me to construction sites, and I would hold the measuring tape and do all sorts of things like that. I always worked with him during breaks from high school. I would work with the architects and project managers in doing the bidding, and my responsibility kept growing to where I was working with the subcontractors.

How did that translate into owning your own business?

In 1988, my father was retiring. He had said, "I don't see you working for someone else." So I came into the company full time, and then a few years later started MacQuesten Development on my own.

You do a fair amount of affordable housing. What is the attraction there?

It is managed risk. I've always built, completed and leased up projects successfully. And I will tell you the margin of profit isn't as great, but then neither is the risk. And I find it a lot more satisfying. Developing affordable housing is complicated because you have to apply for city subsidies on top of the tax credit. I push the envelope with these, and that's how we are able to build a quality building and make housing affordable to people.

But aren't cost and quality often mutually exclusive?

My last project [Arnetta Crawford Housing in the Bronx] is my favorite. We were able to do that on budget and on time, and also experiment with different types of materials. Because I'm an owner, I do pay a little more during the construction phase so I don't have to replace later on. That way you're not putting materials back into the garbage that are not recyclable. It is part of my philosophy on sustainability: Build it better now, put in a few more dollars, still bring it in on budget, and it will last longer.

What do you think of the mayor's affordable-housing plan?

It is still evolving. There are some areas where we could do a little bit more without using taxpayer dollars. It actually starts with the federal government. If we want to do affordable housing, we shouldn't tie the tax-credit rate to the 10-year Treasury rate. On the local level, I strongly recommend we look at [lowering] the water rates.

Development and construction have long been male-dominated industries. Have they changed much over the years?

I still believe it's a culture for men. And I think when [women] are successful in the industry, it makes the men uncomfortable.

What's next?

We have between \$200 million and \$300 million worth of projects in the pipeline that will be coming online soon. ■

“The margin of profit isn't as great with affordable housing, but then neither is the risk



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NAME Rella Fogliano

WHO SHE IS President, MacQuesten Development

AGE 55

BORN Bronx

EDUCATION Fordham University, B.A. in French and communications

TRILINGUAL Fogliano's parents wanted to make sure she was in touch with her roots, so her mother took her to southern Italy as a child. Apparently a quick learner, Fogliano completed the first grade there before returning to the Bronx. At Fordham, she became fluent in French.

TOP BUILDER Fogliano was named Private Developer of the Year by the New York Housing Conference and National Housing Conference in 2014. The award was doled out for her work building 1,500 units of affordable housing during the previous 22 years.

BUCK ENNIS