

Rakow Commercial Realty Group: Representing Tenants For 25 Years



By Sheila Smith Drapeau

Commercial Realty Broker Rick Rakow has been in the business of representing tenants in leasing and property negotiations in the tri-state area for nearly 25 years. Based in White Plains and a resident of Westchester for the past 30 years, the Long Island native established his own business in 1995, forming Rakow Commercial Realty Group, a full-service real estate company that became Westchester County's first tenant-focused brokerage firm.

Mr. Rakow recently spoke to Business Review about his company and Westchester's real estate climate.

Westchester Business Review: What was the philosophy behind creating the first tenant-represented real estate firm in the county?

Rick Rakow: "When I was working for another company, sitting on the other side of the desk, I noticed that tenants who came into the office with a broker in tow were in a much better position to get what they needed and to negotiate those needs to their advantage.

Real estate is generally the largest corporate expenditure, after payroll that a company handles. It also has the greatest inherent risk. What saves a tenant time and money is reliance on an unbiased advocate who knows the tenant's needs, someone who can analyze and help select the best property and subsequently negotiate the best leasing arrangement.

Business Review: What is more prevalent in the county's current leasing market, relocations or renewals?

Rick Rakow: "We handle both. Right now much of our work seems to be in renegotiating leases to help clients stay where they are and assist them in their plans for the future. For example, if (office space) expansion is a possibility at a later date, we look for options that would allow for that.

The key is to know your clients well and find the building, location and office space that best suits their current and future needs. A poorly negotiated lease is a terrible liability.

Tenant advocates must be aware of the pitfalls and avoid costly mistakes. We help the tenant to balance the playing field. It's important that tenant and landlord come to a satisfying agreement because in the end it's the landlord that pays the fee for bringing in the tenant."

Business Review: How diverse are the agencies and companies represented by Rakow Commercial Realty in and around Westchester County?

Rick Rakow: "We're currently representing clients of varying office space needs, from 2,000 square feet to more than 75,000 square feet. We renew, contract and expand our clients and work with prospective tenants that include law firms, public relations agencies, architectural firms, medical companies and professional offices.

We've recently experienced some nice growth and in addition to Craig Ruoff, David Richman and Paul Haight-Moulins, have brought on Peter Robinson, Robert Bresler, and Laurence London, and now have almost 100 years of combined commercial real estate experience to bring to the table.

Business Review: What is your opinion as to how the current economy is impacting commercial leasing and the business market in general in Westchester?

Rick Rakow: I think today's economy is making us work harder and work smarter, but the climate here should stay the same. Looking ahead to the future, I think Westchester will be well-positioned when the economy comes back. Those who are in good shape now will likely remain that way.

The IDA (Westchester County's Industrial Development Agency) has been helpful in that way by bringing and retaining larger companies and corporate headquarters to the county."

Business Review: Do you think the county is nearing build-out? Is there any more room in the

"My mission is to assist clients in that role of tenant advocate and empower that client with knowledge, information and the wisdom to make the right choices."

Rick Rakow,
Rakow Commercial Realty Group

southern, central and northern tiers for another building boom?

Rick Rakow: I think we've come very close to reaching build-out now throughout the southern and central areas, and there doesn't seem to be much room for new building in many northern parts of Westchester where strong zoning laws are being exercised. Armonk has approximately 100,000 square feet of available office space now and I don't think there's any doubt that it will eventually be filled. Westchester is a difficult area when it comes to pre-leasing, however. Most tenants prefer bricks and mortar to a lease in a building that hasn't risen yet."