



Boulderwood blends real estate, design, consulting services

BY JOHN TOWNES

Real estate is a logical match with business consulting services, according to Joanna Roche and Carole Murko. With that combination in mind, the two women have launched Boulderwood Group as a real estate, business consulting and interior design firm based at 38 Church St. in Lenox.

"It's a hybrid model that grew out of what we each have done separately," said Roche, a Lenox native who lives in the town. "We've merged our activities to provide an integrated, full-service approach for clients."

Murko noted that their motto is "Places, spaces and great ideas" to describe their services. "The word 'Places' refers to finding a site," said Murko, who lives in Stockbridge. "Spaces refers to interior design. And we generate ideas to help businesses grow and succeed."

Boulderwood Group, which was launched in February, produced several significant property sales on Kemble Street in Lenox in its initial months, in separate transactions.

They brokered the sale by Shakespeare & Company of the Springlawn mansion to James and Gwen Journey, who plan to convert the mansion into a resort hotel. Boulderwood Group also handled two other separate nearby deals: the sale of the Kemble Inn by Richard Reardon to Bosa Kosovic, and the sale of a carriage house on the street as a residence. These transactions were worth a combined total of \$6.5 million dollars and included 33 acres.

Roche said the physical proximity of these sales was a coincidence. "We got involved with these individually through legwork and contacts," said Roche. "They all just happened to be located near each other."

One of their other clients is David Case, who is redeveloping the Lenox Shops commercial complex on Route 7/20 in Lenox. Boulderwood Group is helping Case to implement a business plan and to market and sell the project, which includes converting the existing complex into commercial condominiums and the planned construction of a residential neighborhood.

Before joining forces with Murko, Roche operated Joanna & Company, a firm she started in 2001 that consulted with clients on marketing, businesses development and public relations. Her clients included the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Mepal Spa and Manor in New Marlboro, artist Danny O, the Taggart House in Stockbridge and ABC Carpet and Home in New York, among others. Prior to that she had worked as communications director at Canyon Ranch spa.



Combining their respective specialties, Joanna Roche (left) and Carole Murko are providing clients with a mix of real estate, design and consulting services with the Boulderwood Group, a new Lenox-based firm.

Murko, who has a master's degree in international economics, had worked in New York and Boston in financial services and marketing. She also ran an interior design business in Boston. She moved to Berkshire County three years ago and sold real estate for a local agency. She received a broker's license last year.

The two women met through a networking organization, became friends and decided to form a business that would combine their areas of expertise.

They augment their own services with a part-time staff of four specialists with additional expertise in interior design and other services, and a network of other experts they can draw on as needed.

Roche said various experiences with clients had shown a relationship between their real estate needs and other aspects of their business operations.

"Clients were frequently asking me about things like leases and locations, so expanding into real estate was a logical combination," she explained.

Roche said the firm's services are available on a flexible basis.

The real estate side is similar to other agencies. They will represent buyers and sellers and will handle small and large properties, including homes.

Roche added, however, that their strategy is to be selective in the properties they will represent. "We plan to only handle properties we are confident we can sell," she explained. "Rather than try to build up a large number of listings, we prefer to give more individual attention to a smaller number of properties."

Their other consulting services include

business planning and development, marketing, interior design and other aspects of operations. These are available on either a multifaceted basis, or clients can retain the firm for more specific projects or services.

Roche said they are relying on referrals mixed with active promotion of their services for their client base. "We're big believers in networking," she said. "That's one of the things we can offer our clients. We also are working hard to promote our own business that way."

She added that they hope to serve a mix of clients in Berkshire County and in other regions.

Murko noted that the diverse aspects of their new venture is personally satisfying. "I wanted to branch out and do other things in addition to real estate," she said. "This is a perfect fusion of all of our backgrounds." ♦