

Why Bill Montana Is Getting REBNY's Broker Recognition Award

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While commercial real estate professionals often play things close to the vest, Savills Studley senior managing director **Bill Montana** is the rare exception.

With Bill—who will be fêted Thursday with REBNY's 2016 **Louis Smedbecker Broker Recognition Award**—his passion for what he does is so infectious, the words practically turn cartwheels when he talks.

"Every deal has its **own challenges**, but for me, the more challenges there are, the more interesting it is," Bill told *Bisnow* last week. "When a client has many issues and you're **ultimately able to solve them**, it's a great feeling."

Of course, after **nearly three decades** providing tenant advisory services to major corporations, institutions and not-for-profit agencies in both the New York metro area and nationwide (among them **Microsoft**, EMC Corp and Mitsubishi International), that could apply to hundreds of transactions.

In this instance, however, the deal Bill is referring to—a **20-year expansion and lease renewal** he helped broker last month for The Teachers Retirement System of the City of New York to occupy **191k SF** at 55 Water St (below)—is a particular source of pride.

"We were handling a **sublease in their building** and we called them to see if they had any **interest in additional space**. It turned out they did," Bill says. "After a **long process**, starting out with building a multi-disciplinary team that included architects, engineers and **extensive strategic planning**, we were ultimately able to achieve all of their objectives and get them everything they wanted."

For Bill, who has also worked with **Sullivan & Cromwell**, **Massey Knakal** and **Samaritan Village**, these are the scenarios he thrives on most. Even so, he admits that achieving such optimal outcomes can sometimes be a delicate balancing act.

“When you first meet a client, you’re like a doctor and you’re saying, ‘**OK, where’s your pain?**’ ‘How bad is it on a scale of one to 10?’” he says. “Strategic planning in commercial real estate is often a more elaborate version of that **diagnostic process**, where you go in and ask clients questions they may not know to ask themselves.”

Raised in **Lake George, NY**, and **Northern New Jersey**, Bill caught the **real estate bug** early in large part due to his family. His namesake paternal grandfather was a commercial broker in Westchester. His stepfather had also been a commercial broker and his father had some real estate interests.

He also credits a **love of reading** for helping to plant the seed. “I read a lot of **biographies** and **autobiographies**,” he recalls. “Whenever I’d read about somebody successful in anything, they often ended up **investing in real estate**. After a while, it **occurred to me** that if all of these smart, successful people got involved in real estate once they found success in other endeavors, then maybe I should start with that. This, plus already having a family background, **cemented that for me.**”

Bill tells us that **Dale Carnegie’s** classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People* made the biggest impression, and he says he re-reads it every January. Reading a biography on **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, which describes how Mr. Olympia wound up amassing a significant real estate portfolio, also inspired him.

“[Schwarzenegger] was a **millionaire** from real estate long before he found success as a film actor,” Bill says. “I remember thinking to myself, ‘It’s just hard work, moxie and focus—this immigrant who could **barely speak English** becomes a millionaire through real estate.’ I just loved it.”

But while he may have known what he wanted to do from a young age, Bill didn’t exactly have an **easy time** finding a job in real estate after graduating from the **University of Colorado at Boulder** with a degree in interpersonal communications and economics in 1987 and moving to Manhattan **that same year**.

“I interviewed at a lot of firms, but after the stock market crash in October 1987, it was **not easy getting hired**,” he says.

Following an initial meeting in 1988 with Newmark Grubb Knight Frank executive **Billy Cohen**, he **nearly struck out there also**. “But as I was leaving and feeling kind of dejected, he handed me this flier and said to me.

'You're from New Jersey. What do you know about this building?'"

With that, Bill says he immediately **got in his car** and drove out to investigate the property, an unremarkable new office building in Patterson that the developer had just built and was having a hard time leasing. Bill took pictures, researched the area, prepared a report and hand-delivered it to Cohen's office two days later.

"Billy said, 'I guess I have to hire you now don't I?' And I said, "I guess you do," Bill recalls. "Billy took a chance on me and I'll **always be grateful for that.**"

After four years at Newmark, Bill was recruited to join the **Edward S. Gordon Co** in 1992. He spent four years there and negotiated several large headquarters lease transactions, including The **Topps Baseball Co** with **Bill Rudin**, before joining Studley in 1996.

Though he enjoys all aspects of his job, Bill says he's particularly fond of working with nonprofits. "Another client we worked with is an organization called **LiveOn** New York, which provides services to the aged. Last year, we helped them **restructure and extend** an existing lease at **49 West 45th St.**

"One of the reasons I got involved in this industry is that **I like to do some good** and helping nonprofits to achieve their real estate goals is a great way of doing this," he says.

Beyond his work in the real estate industry—including being actively involved in **REBNY**, the Young Men's/ Women's Real Estate Association and the Real Estate Services Alliance—he's also a **dedicated philanthropist** and fundraiser for many organizations. He's a Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus and is Deputy Grand Knight of the council in Greenwich, CT, where he lives with his wife and daughter.

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