

Women few, far between in commercial real estate

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Few women have managed to find a spot in top management within the commercial real-estate industry in Denver. Just ask the few: They'll count on one hand their counterparts at other firms.

But those women are confident more women will come into the field if they have role models. Right now, there aren't too many of them, some women in the business say.

And as of last week, there's one less woman in the field now that Kathy Schloessman, a senior vice president for corporate services for CB Commercial, has accepted a position as the president of the Los Angeles Sports and Entertainment Commission.

Still, Denver-area women in real estate also are making strides. One of the more influential groups in town is the Commercial Real Estate Women, a group that has grown in ranks and diversity of its membership.

"I think it's a very hard field for women to break into," said Mary Sullivan, a founder of CREW and first vice president for investments at CB Commercial. "It's a highly competitive business. You compete not only with other firms, but with brokers inside your own firm. You are on a commission-only status. There's only a few people - men or women - that are going to be well-suited for that kind of environment."

Sullivan was one of those who got into the market when it was good in the early '80s and then suffered through the tougher years. "It takes a lot of stamina, it takes a lot of persistence, a good, keen sense of a deal," she said.

These days, with more women in the workforce overall, women are making it into key positions at major public corporations that have to answer to shareholders, Sullivan said. But there haven't been those same opportunities for women in brokerage houses.

"You don't have in our ranks the same kind of diversity that you have in more public corporations," she said.

One of Sullivan's counterparts, Candis Hewitt, a director at Cushman & Wakefield, said the endurance that it takes to get into senior level positions is rough on women.

"I think most women are negotiators, but it's hard for them to go into the really confrontational negotiations," said Hewitt, who ranks in the top 5 percent of performers in her company nationwide. "I think that male ego is really difficult to sit across the table from. They still get by on the old-boy stuff, the good golf game and sports, especially in Colorado."

"You have to know what you do very, very well," she said. "What will help is other women in management positions."

But in general, when she's training men and women and preparing for the day, "I don't think what gender I am. I think about the job." Busy, busy, busy Most everyone in the real estate industry will answer the phone these days (if they can even make it to the phone) with a "Hi, howareya. I'm busy. What's up?" When the economy's strong and business is good, companies are hopping.

That's certainly the case for **DPC Development Co.**, a Denver-based real estate owner and developer, which has a number of projects on its hands right now. As Chris King, vice president at DPC puts it, these are just the "big" projects the company has under way:

*A three-story, multitenant office building known as Syracuse Hill III, 6161 S. Syracuse Way in Greenwood Plaza is under construction. DPC bought the 2.6-acre infill site in July and plans to finish the 44,500-square-foot building by July 1998 - a \$6 million project.

*Garden Gateway Plaza, a 68,000-square-foot building, is getting a 60,000-square-foot expansion. The market wasn't good enough 10 years ago to finish the building, so now DPC is stepping in, King said. The property is on Garden of the Gods Road, about a mile west of I-25, in Colorado Springs.

*A \$7 million project to redevelop University Mall in Fort Collins on College Avenue is getting started. DPC purchased the 150,000-square-foot center for \$5.2 million and plans to create a "power center" - a collection of large-format, single-niche retailers - that will be about 200,000 square feet. Calendar "How Redevelopment has Contributed to a 'New' Downtown," a talk by Susan Powers, executive director of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority, will be presented at the Oct. 14 meeting of the City Club, noon at The Brown Palace Hotel Downtown. Emily Narvaes covers real estate and economic development for The Denver Post. Her column appears every Tuesday. Reach her at business@denverpost.com, and put "narvaes" in the subject field.