

Power Broker

Persistence and a fine-tuned marketing machine helped Reza Etedali broker \$400 million in sales in nine months.

By Peter Hochstein

Many commercial real estate brokers are looking forward to when the sagging economy firms up, vacancies fall and transaction volume picks up again. Retail property specialist Reza Etedali of Sperry Van Ness must hope that things remain just as they are. Between July of last year and April of this year the senior vice president, based in the firm's Irvine headquarters, racked up 11 transactions, resulting in more than \$400 million in sales. That's up from \$150 million in the same period a year earlier.

Etedali's 11 most recent transactions ranged from "small" ones like a \$4.5 million sale with a colleague of the Park Pointe Center in Mission Viejo, to the \$111 million sale of Media City Center in Burbank for Pan Pacific Retail Properties. In both deals, Etedali represented the buyer and seller. "He was able to create a transaction where everyone benefited," says Pan Pacific CEO and President Stuart Tanz, discussing a complicated tax-deferred 1031 Exchange. The deal enabled Pan Pacific to sell Media City Center and at the same time acquire a grocery-anchored shopping center in West Los Angeles from Crown Realty Corp.

Of course, part of Etedali's success comes from the strong demand for retail properties, even as transactions in other property types are hard to close. The 39-year-old broker says grocery-anchored shopping centers, currently offering returns he pegs at 6 percent to 8 percent, are the "number one favorite product" of real estate investors. Many of the purchasers are private buyers, who, he says, are now "the most competitive they've ever been." He remains optimistic that demand will hold up, even if—as some analysts predict—a recovery in the economy, interest rates and the stock market will divert money from real estate. "Interest rates will move up and impact us a bit, but I don't foresee any dramatic change in the market," he says.

John McDermott, the Sperry Van Ness regional manager to whom Etedali reports, points to the broker's marketing machine. Etedali, notes McDermott, keeps a database of 5,000 clients who get an announcement every time he closes a deal and he maintains an active Web site, www.gowithreza.com. Moreover, adds McDermott, Etedali makes 250 to 350 phone calls a week. He has a team of four assistants who help prepare brochures and proposals so he can spend more time with clients.

A graduate of San Diego State with an MBA from USC's Marshall School, Etedali's interest in real estate began in his native Iran, where his businessman father often took him along to inspect property. In one of his greatest feats of salesmanship, he talked his way into a U.S. visa after the Iranian revolution. His first American job was with the construction division of Fluor Corp. He has been in the real estate business for 14 years, eight of them with Sperry Van Ness.

"To me this is not work," he says of his career. "It's got to be in your blood."

Photo: Scott Barkman