

The Closer: Corporate Achiever Leads Local Firm To The Top

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With 25 years in the business, commercial real estate broker Karen Simon, of Dallas-based Bradford Cos., is legendary for her deal-making and for her role as a trailblazer in an industry once dominated by



Karen Simon
Executive Vice President
Managing Partner
Fort Worth

men.

In 1982, Simon became the first female industrial Realtor in Tarrant County and the top producer statewide with Henry S. Miller Co.'s industrial and land division office. Since taking the helm five years ago as executive vice president and managing director of Bradford's Fort Worth office, she has driven the company's top-line growth, becoming its biggest producer. As Bradford's specialist in office, retail-industrial and land sectors in both leasing and sales, she has completed more than 100 transactions valued at \$50 million, combined, that comprise more than 1,500 acres of land and 3.5 million square feet of buildingspace.

To Simon, nothing in life is more energizing than a good challenge—and nothing is more challenging than closing the deal.

"Karen Simon lives for a challenge. If someone tells her she can't do something, look out," said Ed Dalheim of Arlington-based Dalheim Communications. "Whether it's closing a real estate deal or tracking down a donation for a charity, she is creative, focused and relentless. Karen is a charismatic, tireless leader who makes people around her successful."

The Women's Chamber of Commerce of Texas honored the industry pioneer earlier this month, naming her Texas Business Woman of the Year. Simon was recognized for both her real estate prowess and the integral role she has played in helping women business owners and executives flourish and innovate within the corporate world.

"I'm thrilled by their selection and for the opportunity to represent women across the state," says Simon, who also is a founding member of the Tarrant County Women's Chamber of Commerce and a leading fundraiser for the Jewel Charity Ball benefiting Cook Children's Hospital.

"I think organizations like the Women's Chamber of Commerce offer women the networking and guidance for those interested in pursuing any corporate or entrepreneurial opportunities," she says. "Women can meet other women who are struggling or successful in their own field. There's camaraderie and a desire to be helpful to other women."

Trainingground

Simon didn't start out with real estate in mind for a career.

A native of Dallas, she received a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin, a master's in history from TCU and did graduate work at Southern Methodist University's School of Law. She was only 25 hours away from completing her doctorate in history and becoming a professor when reality hit.

"I thought about whether I wanted to do that the rest of my life professionally, and decided I wanted to do something different. So I went out into the world and found what I really liked. And I got paid for doing it," she laughs.

Simon and an associate launched a travel agency, providing in-bound tours through Braniff International Airways. She sold her interest in the business in 1978 and became executive assistant to the regional administrator for the Department of Housing

and Urban Development.

In 1982, she took a leave of absence from HUD to get a real estate license, which again proved challenging. Just shy of the required 60 hours in continuing education, Simon crammed nine classroom hours into three weeks, sat for the exam and passed it first time around.

"No one could have been more surprised than me that I passed it," she says. "I was the last person to walk out of the room. I had never sold a piece of property. And I was entering a field in which there were no other women."

Simon found good training ground with the industrial and land divisions at Miller, The Woodmont Co., Century 21—even her own certified woman- and minority-owned real estate adviser's firm, The Real Estate Group—before being tapped by Bradford's president and CEO Kevin Santaularia to lead the company's local office.

"Bradford Companies is proud to have an individual of Karen's caliber heading our Fort Worth operations. Her connections are stellar, and her creativity in getting a deal closed is second to none," said Santaularia. "We have a history of getting deals closed, both for Bradford's and our clients' account. This has created a mutual respect that goes beyond our business relationship," he said.

Today, Simon finds the greatest challenge in sealing the deal on obsolete industrial properties that require major redevelopment and reuse. She's successfully transformed such outmoded buildings into schools and churches and was responsible for transforming the former Seminary South Shopping Center into a mercado. She's currently marketing a portfolio of six area Albertsons grocery stores and one Mervyns building.

"Women can be successful in the commercial real estate business," Simon says. "We work hard and to the maximum of our capacity. While it's much more common to find women in this field, we are still able to open doors."

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