

REAL ESTATE

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COMMERCIAL BROKER SPOTLIGHT



**Investment Realty
Services, Inc.**

Diverse Beginnings

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By Elizabeth McQuern

Carl and Karen Moose are two very busy and successful commercial real estate professionals with an active young family — “three under three,” as they say — and an impressive list of colleagues, clients and investors who have nothing but praise for the deals they put together. Investment Realty Services, Inc., expertly manages their investors’ real estate assets by providing brokerage, investment services and property management services. IRSI acts primarily as buyers’ agents for investors and represents those who are looking for a long-term strategic partner to support their interests. Their clients also include passive financial investors such as doctors, lawyers and business owners.

Karen is president of Investment Realty Services, and Carl works as managing director, officially speaking. As they explain, this means that Carl focuses his efforts on finding great commercial properties, analyzing them and putting deals together for his company and investors, while Karen puts her energy into managing the properties they own, raising

capital, and forging and maintaining strong relationships with colleagues, clients and investors.

Carl was born in Cleveland Heights, OH, in the early ’60s and has five brothers and sisters, who round out the “Moose herd.” Carl’s mother was a Chicago-bred socialite, and his father was an associate professor of economics. Carl studied at the University of New York, where he got a bachelor’s degree in geology. “Final exams were very demanding of your analytical skills,” Carl explained. “The professor would put a blue book and a rock down in front of you and say, ‘Explain what this was in the past, what it is today and what it’s going to be in a million years,’ literally. That sort of long-term analysis is something I do in my work today.”

Early business experiences taught him maxims he operates on to this day. “When I was in equipment sales years ago, someone told me, ‘Don’t sell equipment . . . solve people’s problems, and they will come back to you again and again.’ And I believe in that today. I see the commercial real estate profession as the best place for me to balance problem solving and interpersonal skills.”

Karen grew up in Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia, the child of an entrepreneurial family. “My father was a strong role model for me and the primary reason I have always been in business,” said Karen. “My dad was

involved in manufacturing and had a plastics company, and he was always encouraging me to look at a variety of businesses. He was a true visionary, with a real creative inventive streak, and liked to invest in a wide variety of things as well.” Karen earned a degree in psychology from Trinity International in Deerfield and took her father’s advice to interview people whose business success inspired her.

“I called up authors and real estate professionals and asked to take them out to lunch,” she explained. She picked their brains, “and that got me really excited about getting into real estate and the prospect of investing. I did a lot of self-education, and by the time I was 27 years old, I had my own, rather large, first real estate development project. I raised the capital for it, and talked to banks, and got it funded, and so very early on I was involved in development projects, as well as rehab projects on single-family homes, and I absolutely loved it. I’ve also always had a knack for building on good things to make them better, and I really like improving things.”

Carl was in the CRE banking business before getting into commercial real estate full time, independently. He worked for LaSalle Bank and

On the Cover: Karen and Carl thrive on the energy of the city and are fortunate to be in the thick of it on a daily basis. Closings at Chicago Title are a hop, skip and a jump away from the “One-Sixty-One Building.”

Karen and Carl enjoy the convenient and comfortable location of their loop office located at 161 North Clark Street, adjacent to the Chicago Title Building.





Carl and Karen rely on a well developed network of real estate professionals to analyze and evaluate deals (From left to right: Nancy Wong, Sean Brady, Carl Moose, Karen Moose, Hawk Durham, Ann Marie Schleck and Paul Liberte).

Washington Mutual, at both as a vice president of CRE Lending, and prior to that was with a merger and acquisition consulting firm. Before that he owned his own sales and service company in the scientific/medical equipment field. “I got into commercial real estate while working for a consulting firm,” he said. “Working side by side with investment bankers analyzing M&A financing feasibility studies, I was exposed to a ton of high-caliber dealmaking. That’s when I got the bug to go out on my own. I had my broker’s license already, primarily to represent myself on my own deals. I never thought I’d be a professional commercial broker or investor, necessarily, but that’s what I’m doing now, and I really enjoy my work.”

Karen was finishing up her developments in the western suburbs when a mutual friend introduced the two, who soon fell in love, got married and started a family. Collectively, the two decided that rather than continuing to work for other firms, they’d combine their strengths and work together, for themselves, so they could spend time with their kids and so IRSI was born.

COMPLEMENTARY COMBINED FORCES

Karen and Carl are supported in their commercial real estate efforts

Carl and Karen are really good about making the investment opportunity make sense to someone who maybe doesn’t know that much about the business. The great thing is that they review with me, once a month, the financial information and information about the performance of the building. It’s rare, as an investor, to find someone who will do that with you every single month.

— Sandy Crowe, Private IRSI Investor

by a small but very strong team. Sue Billman is an analyst on the East Coast who looks for strong project possibilities. Rob Braga is a broker with a lot of experience and whom Carl appreciates for his independent thinking. Shannon Maloney worked for a big developer in Chicago and Las Vegas before joining the IRSI team.

Karen’s day-to-day schedule involves running the management company, which primarily manages the couple’s own real estate assets and interests. “That involves every detail of property management — making sure our tenants, or customers, have a safe and well-maintained building to reside in, managing the maintenance crews and tracking every dollar involved in the finances of those properties. I know where every nickel goes and what it’s for.” And Carl spends a lot of time doing “on the ground” research, seeking out good deals and unique property opportunities.

How do Carl and Karen find new clients, investors and deals? Word of mouth serves them well. They have a strong network of professionals due to the diversity of their combined business backgrounds and maintain a broad range of relationships.

To track down really ripe, unlisted deals, Carl also uses “guerilla” tactics such as talking to local vendors in geographic areas they’re interested in — everyone from waste disposal sales/account managers to

neighborhood hardware store owners to active brokers and agents in the hood. This arms them with “on-the-street” information about properties, which puts them in an even better position to pull off a smart deal. As Carl explained, “We have a knack for finding deals that aren’t listed, and our investors love it, mainly because they’re not competing with other buyers who may be willing to pay a higher price for the same property, if for example, that same property were a listed property.”

They also have strong ties with great brokers and agents that they refer business to regularly, which is key. “These brokers and agents cooperate and collaborate with us by bringing their buyers and their sellers’ deals to us to look at and evaluate, and vice-versa,” Carl said. “As we all know, this business is all about referrals, particularly here in Chicago.”

IRSI also has outlets for a seller’s 1031 funds after a transaction, by offering membership interest opportunities in LLCs they form to acquire properties for our own portfolio. As Carl explained, “The beauty is the investor can be completely hands off, if they choose — we cover all the bases from finding the deal, to analyzing the deal, to financing the deal and managing the property post-closing.”

INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION, CONTROL

Lon Evans, a real estate investment partner on several deals with IRSI, has nothing but praise for Carl’s ability to uncover a gem of a deal that seemed to be off everyone else’s radar entirely. “I’ve worked with Carl on a lot of different projects in Oak Forest and on the south side of Chicago. Carl can usually smell a deal and then has the tenacity to get it to the right people and get the deal closed, whether with investors or lenders, he always lands a good deal on the closing table,” Evans said. “He has his ear to the ground and has street smarts, and the nose for finding deals that aren’t necessarily very high profile. He’s also not afraid to roll up his sleeves and get his hands dirty. He’s very straightforward and up front, and I think people appreciate that. There’s no bull. He gives you straight-up numbers that hold up, and he has a knack for explaining things to people in a simple and clear way. He seems to know what source to go to go get something done. He knows people’s niches and knows who to go to for particular things. He’s got a lot of overall knowledge, and he’s sharp, and he knows what he wants, and he gets it.”

Carl believes that using the broad range of information he has about properties to control them is important to his success. “One thing I firmly believe in is that ‘the time to buy real estate is now.’ I’m lucky to have a lot of strong guidance from older, successful individuals in real estate, and they’ve always emphasized timeliness in executing on deals. Another thing I’ve recognized is the old saying ‘location, location, location is the key to real estate’ is incomplete. Location is key no doubt about it, but I think more importantly, it’s ‘control, control, control.’ You can have the best location in the world, but if you can’t control it, it won’t do you any good. The key is to control a property, however that may occur. And there are many different ways to control a property, even without owning it. You can put options on

I run a half-a-billion-dollar book of CRE lending business, and I’m acutely aware of the difference between what people say and what people do. Carl is a man of his word and I trust him. Carl always follows through, sees things to the end, doesn’t give up, has a positive attitude and he’s just an all-around great guy.

— Patrick Tuohy, WAMU Top Producer, Friend and Mentor of Carl Moose

a property, you can put it under a conventional purchase contract, you may hold warrants or a collateral interest, a second mortgage, a managing/controlling LLC interest, assignments, and so on — there are lots of ways to control a property without having title to it.”

Quality communication is important to Karen and Carl’s strategies in maintaining strong ties in social and professional networks. “I like to keep in contact with people enough to meet their expectations and needs, and when you have something valuable to offer them,” he said. “When I reach out and connect, there has to be substance there, and value to the communication, otherwise I am wasting time, theirs and mine. If I had any advice for people getting into the commercial side of the business, it would be to develop patience and a realistic expectation of how long it takes for a deal to mature. Oftentimes it’s months before deals come down the pipeline with enough traction to make it to closing, hence patience is important.”

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Karen explained that managing relationships is a long-term prospect, just like investing. “You don’t just meet people and fall into investment relationships with them, or at least we don’t,” she said. “We focus on



Karen, Carl and several partners diligently worked countless hours to assemble and control the 25-lot property and 140,000-square-foot warehouse development site located between Lafin and Loomis, just south of the Roosevelt Development corridor.

multimillion-dollar projects, which means developing long-term relationships with sophisticated people, and that takes a lot of time and personal investment on our part, earning trust and helping educate investors about properties, and about the process. Our investment partners want to put their money into something that will help grow their legacy long



C. Gordon Moose, as Carl is known to the radio public, is co-host of the weekly “Livin’ the Dream” radio show. Broadcast archives and info can be found at www.succeedincredblog.com.

(IRSI), attests to the fact that the people behind IRSI make even a real estate newcomer very comfortable with the investment process. “We bought a 13-unit apartment building together, among other things,” Crowe said. “Carl and Karen are really good at communication. They’re really good about making the investment opportunity make sense to someone who maybe doesn’t know that much about the business. The great thing is that they review with me, once a month, the financial information and information about the performance of the building. It’s rare, as an investor, to find someone who will do that with you every single month. Carl is also very creative in the way that he structures a deal, to make it a financial win.”

Hawk Durham is a real estate consultant and agent with @Properties in Chicago and has worked with Carl on several projects, including some not-for-profit ventures. “Carl really helped facilitate work I was doing with clients by bringing in deals that were a perfect match and weren’t even on the market,” said Durham. “Carl is a master networker and one of the most fabulous things about him as a person is that he’s constantly learning. He’s always open and willing to look at a new way of approaching a challenge or problem. The star in his crown is that he’s always looking to exceed what he’s done previously. He’s always trying to better himself and his practices. When he approaches his work, he’s the consummate professional. I know a lot of his clients personally, and I know he really puts his clients and their best interests first, and that’s his long-term strategy for success. That’s what has helped to elevate him to the position he’s in now.”

A BRIGHT ATTITUDE, A BRIGHT FUTURE

Patrick Tuohy, a former WAMU co-worker and mentor, said it’s clear to him that Carl and Karen will continue to find success in their current and future endeavors. “The one thing about Carl that absolutely stands out is that he has a real ‘can do’ attitude,” Tuohy, the top producer at WAMU, emphasized. “He sets a goal and accomplishes it. That’s probably one of his best attributes. He also follows through on what he says he’s going to do. I run a half-a-billion-dollar book of CRE lending business, and I’m acutely aware of the difference between what people say and

term and yet isn’t something they need to attend to from day to day, so we have to demonstrate to them that we can take care of the day-to-day details while keeping an eye on the long-term outcome of their investment.”

Sandy Crowe, a current investment partner on several deals with Investment Realty Services

what people do. Carl is a man of his word, and I trust him, and I love him dearly. When you’ve been in the business for over 25 years, like I have, you become very skeptical of what people say they’re going to do, that’s just the nature of the business. But Carl always follows through, sees things to the end, doesn’t give up, has a positive attitude and he’s just an all-around great guy.”

COACHING THEMSELVES, COACHING OTHERS

Karen and Carl give a lot of credit to the people who offer them support in managing their businesses and busy young family. “We have domestic help and supportive friends and family that help with the kids, and we time-block, and we believe in coaches — we have personal life coaches, a business coach and a coach who helps us with real estate deals,” Carl said. “We, with the help of others, have also developed the ‘CRE Tutor’ Mentoring Program where we help others by passing on strategies and information to those individuals and third-party company staff members interested in commercial real estate.” (For info go to www.succeedincredblog.com/.)

Carl acknowledged benefiting tremendously from several important mentor figures in his life. “I have had several mentors who, in the past, would often say to me ‘When are you going out on your own?’

“I joke about one of my mentors named Saul. You know that book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*? Well, I had ‘Saturdays with Saul.’ He helped me solve problems and grow as a serious real estate professional and investor. I still do rely on Saul to always give me really good, honest advice and feedback.”

SATISFACTION: ACHIEVEMENT AND BALANCE

Where does the best feeling of accomplishment come from all of Karen and Carl’s hard work? “I get a lot of satisfaction knowing that our staff feels good about the work they do, and from knowing that our investors are happy with what we do for them,” Karen said. “And looking at our kids and knowing that Carl and I run a thriving business and have three happy kids as well is just a wonderful thing.”

They are both adamant that spending time with the children — Morgan Elizabeth, Brianna Marie and Otto Mathius — is of paramount importance. As Carl said, “I could make \$10 million a year for the next 20 years, but it wouldn’t mean anything to me if, in 20 years, my kids feel like they didn’t have enough time with Mom and Dad.”

Carl particularly enjoys the energy of “sealing the deal” at closing, after a long, hard-fought effort, which is often the case in a commercial real

The availability that Carl offers made the CRE Tutor program more than worth it to me. To have someone walk you through the steps — from finding a deal, to securing funding and knowing how to present a deal to an investor, has made the program very beneficial to my development.

— Sue Billman, IRSI Property Analyst and CRE Tutor Graduate

estate transaction. “I get excited about closings — I go to all of them, and my clients’ as well,” he said. “We do about 10 or 12 commercial deals a year, and I get satisfaction knowing that if things come up, even at closings, I have the ability to manage it and take care of it. I had a closing just over a year ago, and there were 14 people in the closers office, and it took a lot of patience and effort to keep that thing from unraveling. It took focus, persistence and organized effort to keep that project together right down to the ‘brass tacks,’ and I got a lot of satisfaction from seeing that through to completion.”

EXCITING NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Carl and Karen are very proud of the educational model they have put together for commercial real estate training, called CRE Tutor, which is made up of several different specialized 13-week coaching programs and proprietary software with an interactive online platform, all of which is designed for people who are just gearing up in commercial real estate or are experienced and looking to pump up their CRE game. “It wasn’t my goal to become an educator, per se, but I enjoy teaching and helping others grow,” according to Carl, who went on to explain: “The CRE Tutor program offers the traditional academic information, knowledge and tools that you can get in other books or seminars. Beyond academics, what makes the CRE Tutor programs unique are three things: 1) We form and encourage community and networking with other participants to leverage learning and resources; 2) We look at real deals during the course(s) as opposed to hypothetical or antiquated examples of deals; 3) The courses are stretched over a reasonable period of time, typically 13 weeks, to sufficiently engage learning through spaced repetition.”

Sue Billman, a current employee of IRSI who works as a real estate analyst, has gained a lot of momentum in her career from her participation in the CRE Tutor program. “I’ve learned a lot from the program. I haven’t done a lot of independent work in terms of buying on my own yet, but I feel like I could now,” Billman said. “You can go on a lot of websites and get information, but to use a program like this where you have someone there to walk you through the process, is so valuable. That availability that Carl offers made the program more than worth it to me. After you’ve found a good opportunity, to have someone walk you through the next steps — to secure funding, and knowing how to present a deal to an investor and so on, it’s really been very beneficial to my development.”

Karen and Carl are also excited about the prospect of expanding IRSI’s horizons into the area of lease buyback opportunities. He explained, “It’s going to be a new, exciting experience for us, and also an opportunity to tap into our resources with our mentors in an effort to reach a new level of expertise.” And since their business style doesn’t lend itself so much to traditional training and managing of people,



Carl and Karen work and live in the city on the near west side, and enjoy the backdrop of the cityscape from their private rooftop deck.

PHOTO BY KURT GERBER, WWW.GERBERSCARPELLI.COM

Carl really helped facilitate work I was doing by bringing in deals that were a perfect match and weren’t even on the market. One of the most fabulous things about him as a person is that he’s constantly learning, and he’s always looking to exceed what he’s done previously.

— Hawk Durham, Real Estate Consultant and Agent with @Properties

Karen and Carl aren’t looking at establishing a huge office. They predict that IRSI growth will come through joining alliances with like-minded professionals to go after bigger and bigger deals. “Our goal is to expand to a staff of roughly 10 people in the next year, or so. IRSI currently operates out of an office at 161 N. Clark and has plans to open an office in the south loop.”

With their visionary view of commercial real estate, their desire to challenge themselves, learn and share knowledge, continuing greater success clearly figure heavily into the future of IRSI and Karen and Carl Moose. ■

Contact Information

To contact Investment Realty Services, please call (312) 421-5377 or e-mail cgordonmoose@cretutor.com or karen@investment-realty-services.com