

SUBSCRIBE TO UBJ

GET OUR WEEKLY EMAIL



UPSTATE
BUSINESS
JOURNAL

UBJ

FRONT PAGE

NEWS

SECTIONS

COMMUNITY



Seduction. Sleek. Sporty.
The 2016 CLA250
starting at \$32,050

CARLTON MOTORCARS

www.CarltonMB.com | 864.213.8000
2446 Laurens Road | Greenville, SC 29607



A 'child of the world'

JANUARY 29, 2016

by Sherry Jackson



Tweet

In 40 years as a CRE mogul, Elizabeth Belenchia's vision has grown to circle the globe

After 40 years owning her own commercial real estate business in Spartanburg, Elizabeth Belenchia has learned a few things: The former registered nurse says she has a knack for project management, a keen eye focused on the bottom line and an acute interest in cultural geography.

She has built her CRE company, Carroll Properties, into far more than

WE
CREATE
IN ORDER
TO HELP
HUMANS
FLOURISH.

MEET OUR TEAM

ipso
ipsocreative.com

Tweets from @UpstateBiz/ubj-homepage-feed

just selling industrial real estate. She has brought businesses from 27 countries into South Carolina. Her client list includes Tyco Electronics, Safety Kleen, Somet, International Paper, Dana Corporation, Mermet Weaving, Hess America, McDonalds, Loves Travel Centers, UPS, Comfort Inn, National Products Corporation, Goodyear, Coca Cola and Clearwater LLC.



Belenchia describes herself as a passionate and visionary “child of the world,” and focuses the majority of her time on global issues such as sustainable economic development. She wrote and managed South Carolina’s first EPA Brownfield pilot in Cowpens and was the first woman in the world to be designated a Certified Commercial Investment Member/ Society of Industrial and Office Realtors (CCIM/ SIOR).

In 2015 she was named a Woman of Influence by the Real Estate Forum. She serves on several boards, including a current stint as vice president of the legislation and environment committee for The International Real Estate Federation (FIABCI), an NGO of the United Nations, which takes her across the world to discuss real estate-related issues.

UBJ sat down with Belenchia to learn about what she does, how it all works and what she is most passionate about.

You were a registered nurse. How did you decide on a career change to commercial real estate?

I wanted a career change. At the time, I had four small children and was a single mom. At first I was diverted into residential real estate for the first five years in three different states. Frankly, I was told that women couldn’t do commercial real estate, but after managing three residential firms I realized that I really enjoyed the firing line, not management. I had an instinct for business and that’s what made me see the value proposition in commercial real estate.

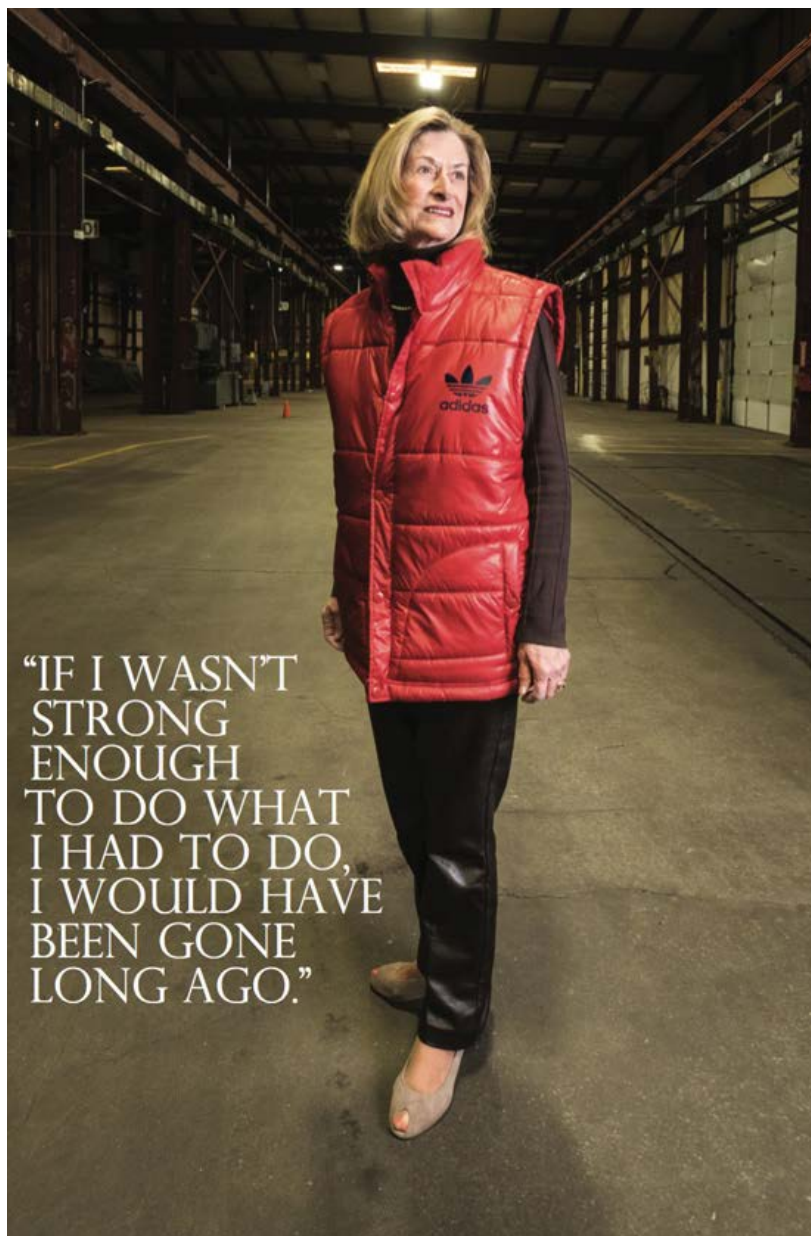
I took some of the first CCIM classes that were offered in the country.

Early on, I gleaned those skills and earned that designation since I was living in a relatively rural and obscure area of the U.S. [Belenchia lives in Spartanburg]. What I found attractive from the beginning is that commercial real estate is the core of internationalism. As a cultural geographer, a personal passion, it made me interested in other people's cultures, their geography, imports/ exports and how trade worked. I had a natural affinity towards that kind of thinking needed.

What are the most important skills your company offers over others?

Keeping the timing and the budget. That's the area still today that sets me apart from others. As an RN, you have to be on budget and on time; you don't have the flexibility to not be.

It's also helpful when dealing with international clients whose travel time is time-critical. They need that delivery, and it was just innate with me. It's something I expected of myself and not just an expectation from my clients.



How did you decide to focus on industrial commercial real estate?

It was the market that was here and that was available at the time. It was the market that also sort of sought me out. In the 1980s we didn't have the Internet and there wasn't the opportunity to do international advertising from a small company in Spartanburg. So my advertising was to give people 150 percent service, and they in turn would refer others to me.

Over 50 percent of my work today is consulting, mostly focused on site consulting to find the right site or location for a business and then walking them through that whole process.

You've mentored a lot of young people. Why, and what do you get out of it?

I just have a knack for it. I've had approximately 160 interns over the years with a lot from other countries. I learned from them and was able to share my ideas with them.

I like the way young people think. I found so many of them don't have a handle on their own unique ability and talent. I'm a Kolbe certified consultant and a strategic coach. One of the main things I try to teach is that nobody ever developed a good weakness, and no one should ever spend any time trying to improve a weakness.

I share the story about the duck and the rabbit. A rabbit instinctively knows how to hop. A duck instinctively knows how to swim. But the rabbit decided he wanted to cross-train and learn how to swim, so the duck said "okay." They spent six weeks training each other. After six weeks, the rabbit still couldn't swim and the duck still couldn't hop. And what they found was that the rabbit couldn't hop as well and the duck couldn't swim as well, as they'd been spending time on their weakness. Eighty-five percent of multinational corporations believe people should cross-train, which means we lose productivity. I'm helping people discover that a rabbit is never going to swim, and that's okay.

You've owned your own business for 40 years and you've been independent the whole time. Do you think that's helped you?

If I wasn't strong enough to do what I had to do, I would have been gone long ago. If I had to depend on other people to feed me business, I wouldn't have survived. Having to learn the whole process so I could do it all if I had to was key. Having gone through lots of different financial crises, I've seen how traditional financing can kill a new business, and I've been able to find ways of bundling all of the different pieces for clients. I wouldn't have been able to do that if I didn't own my own company.

I also don't have any employees. For each project, I bring in consultants. The big boys have the same 15-member team for each project, and not everyone is a specialist in everything. By being able to customize the team, my clients aren't having to pay for someone who isn't an expert on what they're trying to accomplish or someone they don't need.

You're very much a proponent of peace, energy and social interaction. What do you think South Carolina needs to do in those areas?

I'm much more of a bridge-builder than a fence-builder; if you don't dialogue about peace and understanding, you don't have a conversation. Everybody can't do everything, but everybody can do something. If everyone reached out to one person, I think we'd have a healthier world and safer environment.

How is it that we can instantly hate but we can't instantly love? It's an opportunity to grow. I think that South Carolina is in a unique position. We have more foreigners per capita than any other state in the nation. We are in a position to lead the thinking. We have sunshine, yet Germany has more solar than we do. We can lead in energy efficiency. We can be leaders in social interaction. We have a wealth of resources. We need those great conversations more than once a year.

When companies relocate to South Carolina, what do you think is our one greatest asset?

Critical mass. There are already people here from a lot of other countries. We didn't always have that. There's an established community of like-minded people.

Our rural areas are almost vacant in the state, but they all have huge potential. The trail systems and the blueways – realizing that we have an incredible natural environment. This state is an absolute wealth of natural resources, and we don't appreciate them. We live in the Garden of Eden, yet we don't treat it like that. These same rivers that were the engine for the textile industries have the potential for economic growth. We need to capitalize on all of that, but it's usually the people from somewhere else that respect it more than we do.



"NOBODY EVER DEVELOPED A GOOD WEAKNESS, AND NO ONE SHOULD EVER SPEND ANY TIME TRYING TO IMPROVE A WEAKNESS."

What's the No. 1 reason companies choose to relocate to SC?

It isn't cheap land and cheap labor – those days are gone. It's that we have community colleges to train workers in highly skilled technical areas. We still have a lot of land. We have a positive business climate. We have an international base. We have the institutions of higher learning that can support research. We just need more of it. We need great communication between them, and we need people working together.

What project are you most proud of if you had

to pick just one?

About five years ago I had an intern from Pakistan. She had a financial background and started documenting things from my files and discovered I had done business with 25 different countries – I've since added two additional countries. We began testing that against other individuals, and I believe I have an international record of locating foreign international investment from 27 different countries into the Upstate.

You are involved a lot with the United Nations for real estate and sustainability. What are your duties?

This year I was made a member of The UNECE [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe]. Basically, we're putting together some metrics for the world on housing. Affordable housing, sustainable housing and how to deal with housing crises during wars or climate impacts such as tsunamis. We're looking at ways multinational corporations and companies around the world can invest in affordable housing, which we call workforce housing.

How often do you travel?

Probably three or four major trips a year.

Do you have a favorite country?

No, I haven't found one I don't like.



TAGS: [commercial real estate](#), [cover story](#)

« [The future of industrial real estate](#) | [CRE quarterly market reports](#) »



GREENVILLE JOURNAL

TOWN
MAGAZINE

[Contact Us](#) | [UBJ Staff](#) | [Past Issues](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Submit](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)
©2016 Community Journals Publishing Group. All Rights Reserved | PO Box 2266 Greenville, SC 29602 | (864) 679-1200