



Friday, February 19, 2010

## San Antonio real estate firm rolling out new health care division

San Antonio Business Journal - by [W. Scott Bailey](#)

The commercial real estate industry has felt the effects of a national recession, causing some real estate firms to proceed with caution while others have seized on the downturn as an opportunity to expand or evolve.

San Antonio's **Investment Realty Co.** has taken the latter approach and, in an effort to tap into the Alamo City's growing health and biosciences industries, is launching a new health care division.

San Antonio's health care industry has thrived in spite of the economic downturn. The federal government is spending some \$2 billion in the Alamo City, in part to convert Fort Sam Houston into a major military medical center.

Medtronic, a Minneapolis-based medical technology company, is expanding its diabetes division to San Antonio's Northwest Side and is expected to create some 1,400 jobs in the Alamo City over the next few years.

Investor Realty Co. President Steve Raub says his firm has taken notice of those wins and other factors in launching its new IRC Healthcare division.

"As the company has continued to evolve, San Antonio has continued to grow and we see more opportunities in the market," Raub explains. "So we've added additional brokers and additional business units. And we now want to focus part of our attention on health care."

What Investment Realty Co. wants is a piece of the action. And Raub says his firm has the elements and the expertise in place to capture some of that growing health care business.

"Health care professionals have spent many years developing their own expertise and specialties," Raub says. "Now, we want to give them a chance to work with us in our specialty, which is commercial real estate."

"What we are attempting to do with this health care division is to provide a bridge between their world of providing quality health care and the world of commercial real estate," he

adds. "We want to be the specialists who help the specialists, to help the people who save lives also save money and time."

### **Next generation**

The recession has created hardships for a number of industries. The commercial real estate industry has been hit particularly hard and the ripple effect has created a new round of concerns for lenders.

Last month, Bob Bach, senior vice president and chief economist for **Grubb & Ellis Co.**, said the commercial real estate sector "still has a ways to go before reaching its own low point."

The "good news," he added, was that "the free-fall we saw in 2009 is over, and the future is more certain, giving owners and users of real estate the confidence to begin making decisions again."

Raub says the recession has resulted in a "dramatic downturn" in the commercial real estate sector.

"What we are doing (with the new health care division) is positioning Investment Realty Co. for the next generation," he says.

IRC Healthcare will represent physician groups and health care organizations seeking to lease, purchase or sell medical space and medical buildings.

It will, for example, actively represent medical organizations seeking to acquire land for the development of medical office buildings and other facilities.

Marcelino Garcia and Joanne Vollmer Mirelez will help head up the new IRC Healthcare division.

Garcia says Investment Realty Co. can fill an important void, providing health care clients with real estate expertise.

"We are all experts at something. But none of us are experts at everything," he says.

Says Raub, "We want to be the guides that take (health care clients) from one side of the canyon to the other."

### **Timing is critical**

Investment Realty Co. was launched in 1975, long before anyone viewed San Antonio as a major player in the health care arena. But the city has since evolved. And so has the company.

IRC Healthcare is pursuing a broad range of prospective clients, ranging from physician groups and pharmacies to medical clinics and billing companies.

“We understand the health care industry, the financial constraints and time constraints,” Mirelez explains. “We understand the terminology. And we understand the finance of health care. I think that will allow us to bond with the industry.”

Raub says the launching of a new division is all about timing.

“Timing is very critical in real estate,” he says. “Right now is a good time to start things. It’s a tough time to try and finish things.

“We see health care as a very, very big growth area for San Antonio,” he adds.

Investment Realty officials want to tap into that growth.

While Mirelez points to opportunities in areas such as Boerne and New Braunfels, Garcia points to the Texas-Mexico border, an area he says which has experienced “phenomenal” growth.

“We are definitely looking at San Antonio and South Texas,” he says.

How important — and timely — is this new launch for Investment Realty?

“Health care is such a big part of San Antonio,” Raub says. “Then you have the graying of America. You have Baby Boomers looking for more and more health care.

“I expect that (IRC Healthcare) will represent about 25 percent of our business,” Raub adds. “It’s going to be a major part of our company.”