

BY SANDRA PESMEN EXECUTIVE WOMAN

Endless energy and ability build broker's career

So tell us, Gail Sturm, how did you become so successful so fast? Did the fact that you're a beautiful woman have anything to do with it?

Unlike most bright, young woman executives, this 31-year-old senior vice president of Lincoln Property Co.—who arranged sales totaling more than \$80 million in the last seven years working as a commercial realty broker—isn't insulted when she hears that.

Instead she laughs, tosses her mane of soft blonde hair and replies unabashedly, "In one sense, yes. When I started out in the industrial real estate business in 1979, I was able to get through doors more easily because men were interested in seeing a 23-year-old woman come through their door."

But that's where the free lunch ended.

Sturm admits clients also seem attracted to her "excitement and enthusiasm; everyone always notices that and I guess it's contagious." She also knows that excitement and enthusiasm don't close any deals.

That happens because of her maturity, professionalism and in-depth knowledge of every project she works on.

So what made Gail Sturm so mature, professional and well-researched so fast?

"I was the eldest of four children and our mother died when I was 18," she says quietly. "We were always a very close family and that made us even closer. I'm sure it also made us grow up faster."

Sturm also remembers being greatly influenced by her businessman-father and by her mother's great uncle who had an avid interest in real estate and spent a lot of time with her. "Our uncle was a physicist who worked from his home, but he was always reading everything he could about real estate and he shared those ideas with me."

It's that initial exposure to the real estate business that started Gail Sturm on a career that continues to build on high achievement.

When talking with this Lake Forest resident, it becomes obvious that her extensive real estate background developed over the last decade because she sought out excellent professionals in the industry to serve as role models and mentors, learning everything she

friend, Willard Brown Jr., then executive vice president and now president of Rubloff Inc."

An early morning interview was arranged, during which Brown discussed the different types of real estate and suggested Sturm go into industrial. "Gail, our firm has no women in industrial real estate and we have 18 men," he said. "We'd welcome a change."

Sturm was introduced to the 18 men on that board and subsequently was accepted into their group as an industrial broker.

"For the first two months I visited all the industrial parks, obtained the files for each and completely familiarized myself with the buildings and the surrounding area. I learned the difference between a truck-level dock and a drive-in door, and memorized floor plans," she remembers. "I wore a hard hat and boots. It was anything but glamorous to climb through manufacturing and warehouse facilities. And I was the only woman doing that at the time."

It usually takes from nine to 12 months for brokers to finish training and get their feet wet but in a matter of months, Sturm arranged a lease for Midas International Corp. and sold an industrial building in Franklin Park—and she

was on her way, tackling the industrial market.

But Sturm isn't one to sit back and just enjoy success. Since she always kept close tabs on what was going on around her, she soon realized that manufacturing was moving toward a slump in 1980 and the industrial market was no longer the booming place to be.

"I began to think commercial real estate would be more lucrative. Since I'd met Elliott Otis, then president of Elliott Otis & Co., I contacted him. His company was leasing the three build-



Gail Sturm, senior vice president of Lincoln Property Co.

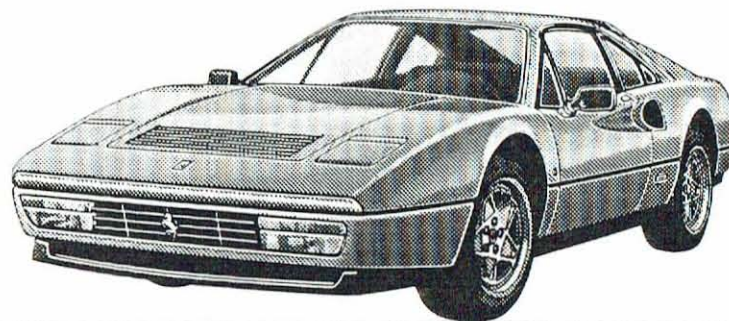
could from them.

After graduating with a B.B.A. (Bachelor of Business Administration) from St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind., Sturm worked for a year and a half as manager of a cash-processing center for Allstate Insurance Company. Though she enjoyed managing people, soon she was bored because the work was too structured and she started to look for a new challenge.

"But I made some good friends in management," she recalls, "and when I mentioned my interest in real estate to one friend, he suggested I meet his

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ings in Northbrook's Combined Centre Complex and he said, "Well Gail, now that you've had some training, if you're interested, I'll hire you."

She joined Otis in June 1980. With only one secretary, the pair set up surveys on all the buildings along the Tri-state/Edens Expressway corridor and eventually expanded into all the suburban markets.

Together, they made presentations and represented companies small and large, helping them find, lease and purchase office space in commercial buildings.

Sturm was involved with Otis in the transaction of more than a million square feet of office space, valued at more than \$80 million, and, true to form, she quickly became an executive vice president.

With her help, Elliott Otis & Co. grew to become The Otis Realty Group, with three offices: Northbrook, Deerfield and Schaumburg.

In addition, in March Sturm was elected to the Board of Directors of The Chicago Office Leasing Brokers Association, where she's serving a three-year term and has been named co-chairman of its Ethics Committee. The committee is currently involved in re-evaluating its code of ethics.

This year, just as Sturm began thinking she wanted to become more involved in real estate development, Lincoln Property Co. made an offer she couldn't refuse and she joined the firm in May.

And, she believes, being a woman still helps.

"Yes," she muses, "A woman executive does have special advantages in this field because you are unique, particularly when you get to this level. But like any man, you can't expect anything to happen unless you make it happen."

So tell us Gail Sturm, how do you make things happen?

That enthusiastic, contagious smile flashes again as Sturm answers, "Everything is a direct result of your energy. If you walk into your office and do nothing—nothing will happen. But if you walk in, pick up the phone and start calling, something always happens."

She pauses, then adds, "I pick up the phone!"

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