



DUKA

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT INC.



Supplement to
CondoBusiness
Magazine



DUKA

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

“Our goal is not to be the largest property management firm, just the best...”

By Matt Bradford



It was with keen instincts and entrepreneurial flare that Altin Nani first opened the doors to Duka Property Management Inc. (previously known as Al-Can Property Management) in 2002. Now, over twelve years later, those same strengths continue to drive Nani and his team in growing what has become one of the most respected property management brands in the industry.

Headquartered in Mississauga, Ontario, both Duka Property Management and its sister company, Duka Consulting, were born out of Altin's ambition to turn decades of experience in the consulting field into a new venture that would seize the opportunities in one of Canada's hottest development markets. His plan was to introduce a unique, full-service property management company to the industry, catering to evolving needs of developers, condominium corporations, and residents alike.

"I was in the right place, at the right moment, and associated with the right people," recalls Nani.

"I realized it was an opportune time to start, so I did."

Among those people included Adriana Shollo, who joined Duka from the beginning in an administrative position, and later assumed her current role as Director of Administration and Human Resources. Together, the duo operated Duka as an ancillary venture until skyrocketing activity within the

Greater Toronto Area (GTA) motivated Nani to take Duka to the next level.

"When we first started out, I was running Duka like a side business and I kept it that way until late 2005," he recalls. "After that, we saw just how much the economy was thriving, how the condo market was evolving around us, and how much opportunity was out there, so my focus completely changed. From then on, I knew I had to give 100 per cent of my time to the business."



That decision kicked off a period of exponential growth for the company, and one that would continue throughout the following decade. Today, Duka Property Management manages around 70 condominium projects in and around the GTA, and is home to a staff of more than 55 professionals and growing. The two sides of Duka work in tandem to offer clients a large breadth of services, with Duka Consulting providing consulting services exclusively for developers,

and Duka Property Management assuming managerial services for condominium projects.

“The scope of work of each company is completely different,” says Nani, explaining, “In order to avoid a conflict of interest, Duka Consulting does not provide chargeable services for clients of Duka Property Management. However, our consulting team provides training and back-up to our property managers when it’s required.”

Speaking to the strengths of Duka and its team in whole, he adds: “Right now, I consider both businesses to be running really well and have established into mainstream companies.”

SETTING MILESTONES

Duka Property Management’s upwards trajectory is marked with numerous accomplishments. Among these include its ACMO 2000 Certification, which it received in 2012 for meeting the principals and standards set out by the Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario’s Quality of Service Program.

“That was a real challenge for us,” reflects Shollo. “We really worked hard for



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ACMO 2000 Certification, and in the end we're proud to say we were successful."

That designation now hangs front and centre in Duka's lobby; however, it serves a far greater function than office decoration. Says Shollo, the certificate represents the team's ongoing commitment to upholding the upmost levels of industry service, both within its head office and wherever Duka may be providing their services.

"We make a great effort to make sure that all of our sites comply with Duka and ACMO 2000 standards," affirms Shollo. "That means conducting many site audits to ensure all the filing systems are in order, all the administration policies are being met, and all the procedures are being followed."

"As a certified company of ACMO 2000, that's a must. It's very important for us to ensure all of our sites comply," she adds.

In 2014, Duka inked another important chapter to its history books. In his bid to bolster the company's footprint within the GTA, as well as increase its already impressive portfolio, Nani acquired Whitestone Property Management Limited, a Toronto firm

that had carved its own notable inroads into the GTA market.

For Nani, it was a decision he did not come by lightly, but one that was worth the gamble in order to reinforce Duka's stability and boost its brand. "At the time, I was considering all the growth that was happening and all the condos that were being constructed, and I knew that in order for us to get better exposure, we had to get bigger."



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L-R: ALTIN NANI, B. ENG., RCM, ACCI (PRESIDENT); **ADRIANA SHOLLO**, RCM (DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES); **JOVE CHAN**, RCM (REGIONAL MANAGER); **MITAR SIJAKOVIC**, B. SC., RCM, AIHM (REGIONAL MANAGER); **MIHAL NANI**, RCM (REGIONAL MANAGER)

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The acquisition has done just that. Since sealing the deal in May 2014, the acquisition has brought numerous benefits through Duka’s door, among which being a greater presence in the GTA and a greater scale when negotiating deals from its service providers – a benefit Duka is always eager to pass on to its clients.

Additionally, Nani says acquiring Whitestone has helped forge stronger connections to GTA developers, noting, “It was such a connection that made us decide to conclude this acquisition. The potential of the projects that Whitestone had on the grid over the next three to five years was significant. Considering Duka’s experience with new buildings and developers, in conjunction with Whitestone’s portfolio and future businesses, and taking under consideration all the finances involved, it made sense to assess, evaluate, and finally conclude the deal.”

As an added perk, the acquisition has equipped Duka with fresh talent from Whitestone’s roster, all of which have been welcomed with open arms.

THE DUKA DIFFERENCE

There are many factors that elevate Duka Property Management in its industry. On a larger scale, it’s the company’s ability to combine talents and insights from Duka Consulting to offer clients a wider selection of property consultancy and management services.

“We’re able to get involved with our client from day one,” says Nani, noting Duka’s services include assisting in the design concept stage with everything from giving input on the building’s layout and individual unit details. “That’s our niche. Our sister company, Duka Consulting, is the only consulting company that provides development service without being a first-hand developer. This is an asset for Duka Property Management, because it gives our management team a deeper

understanding of each condominium and all the issues, because the consulting team is able to go through the process from the start.”

Indeed, Duka’s strength lies in its ability to contribute expert services to virtually all stages of a condo’s development and maintenance. Moreover, it is strengthened by its vast network of consultants, sub-contractors, and head office talent that enable Duka to contribute to nearly all stages of development, straight through to the final handover.

“We really do it all,” says Jove Chan, Duka’s Regional Manager for Toronto East. “That includes project design, marketing, site inspections, construction management, efficiency analysis, and even dealing with the many different city government departments on site plan approvals and condo registration. We’ll even coordinate with the purchaser, so if someone comes to buy a unit and they want to upgrade or modify a unit, we’re the people to make it happen.”

Duka also goes to great lengths to educate its staff on how to manage the development and properties effectively, and match its people with the right projects to ensure genuine and lasting relationships are made. For example, Chan notes, “In the past, we’ve had some Chinese developments, so we’ve had to find architects our clients trusted. They may not have been mainstream, but they were someone they were comfortable with. This is our strategy.”

It’s this level of comprehensive service that contributes greatly to Duka’s reputation; earning it widespread word of mouth and referrals from its long list of satisfied clients.

“Our mission is to give clients the best of our abilities, and to work closely with Board of Directors and residents to ensure the integrity of the property’s value,” affirms Mihal Nani, Toronto Regional Manager for Toronto’s Downtown and Lakeshore Park, adding, “That’s one the of the main reasons we’re growing. It’s the referrals we get from our current board of directors, residents, and people we meet every day. That’s what gives us our greatest opportunities.”

THE TALENT ADVANTAGE

Ask Duka’s staff and management what truly separates the company from its competition and they’ll tell you it’s the people. What began in 2002 as a modest, two-person operation has flourished throughout the past twelve

years to include talent from across the industry; each of which bring their own skills and perspectives to Duka’s dynamic team.

“We have some amazing people working here,” says Shollo. “ Our entire staff puts in quite an effort and is extremely dedicated. It’s not uncommon to have projects where everyone will come in, work together, and stay long hours just to complete whatever needs to be done. And that’s

not just head office, but everyone at our site offices as well.”

The strength of Duka’s team is also owed to its diversity. Duka’s head office is populated with professionals hailing from numerous disciplines and backgrounds, the result of which has created one of the most multi-cultural teams in the business.

“Diversity is a big thing for us,” affirms Mitar Sijakovic, Regional Manager for Toronto West, “We’re a

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Value Add

Adding value is what Duka does best. Just one example of this is Duka's Free of Charge General Audit; a zero-fee service provided by its consulting team to new clients that identifies, assesses, and provides solutions for a wide range of common property issues. In addition to shedding light on problems that may have otherwise gone unnoticed, the audit helps solve prior oversights and save money on operational costs.

"This service is not like what you'd get from a regular auditor. We're going in and seeing things from a different perspective. For instance, we'll go in and assess how many units are in the building, calculate how much the client is paying for hydro, we figure out if that consumption is normal. If it isn't, we'll figure out if it's because of the fixtures, misuse, or something else," explains Nani.

Overall, the audit includes a visual inspection of the building's components, utility, accounting and administration, and analysis—the results of which can be used to decide the best type of contract for each individual building, be it comprehensive or preventative maintenance.

"It's about getting into all the details and asking questions like, 'How much are the mechanical expenditures?', 'Is that normal for the age of the building?', and 'What type of contract does the client have in place?,'" explains Nani, emphasizing that, "Duka Consulting under no circumstances is acting or intending to undertake the role of condo corporation engineer or consultant."

The Free of Charge General Audit has been a staple offering of Duka's for some time; and judging by the feedback it's generated from clients, it's also one of the most popular. "Our clients have reported a lot of benefits from such audits and the advantage is that we are the only management company in the market that is able to provide such service, which lends itself to be our most unique sales proposition," says Nani, noting the final results also provide clients a base level from which to judge Duka's own performance.

"For clients, it's a very important tool. It is very unique and has been proven to save money and improve the building," he adds.

very multi-cultural team, and I think that's a huge advantage. There's diversity all over the city, so having different cultures in the same building only benefits the company."

This staff dedication and loyalty is aided by Duka's focus on talent development. In addition to holding in-house training, and inviting industry partners to conduct on-site presentations, Duka finances continuing education for all its site administrators and property managers. It also supports its staff in their acquisition of ACMO's Registered Condominium Manager (RCM) designation.

"More than 80 per cent of my property managers are RCMs and whoever is not is writing the RCM or has just written it. By those stats alone, I take pride in knowing we have one of the most qualified staff in the industry," says Nani.

Duka's talent is further strengthened through its commitment to developing from within and taking extra care to match its staff with the most fitting projects.

"Our strategy at Duka is to get the property managers on the field, support them as they learn, and encourage them to take the RCM," explains Mihal Nani. "Once they arrive at a certain stage in their development, we'll transfer them to a new, more demanding site -- although all sites have their own difficulties and challenges."

All told, it's the staff that comprises the lifeblood of Duka's operations. Of course, says Sijakovic, it helps that Duka is simply a good place to work. "We have an extremely low level of turnover, and that goes for our clients, too. It's the culture here; the interpersonal touch that Duka maintains. Everyone wants to work for us, and we have great retention, because you are not just a number in the company, you're a really valuable part of development and the organization."

Achieving this office dynamic is something Duka's management takes with pride. In fact, says Nani, he counts his team as the company's greatest achievement to date. "I can say with full honesty we would not be where we are without them, and I mean that in every aspect. I'm lucky to have these people working at Duka and working with them as well. I'm impressed by their dedication, their professionalism, and their forward thinking about Duka."

"This, to me, has been the company's biggest success."

EMBRACING CHALLENGE

Staying one step ahead is second nature for Duka, especially in an industry confronted by dwindling talent pools and shifting regulatory landscapes. With these challenges in their sights, Duka's team makes planning for the future a strategic priority.

"With the way the condos are being developed, and the speed they're being developed, it's created a lack of good professionals. I don't want Duka or myself being in front of this difficulty, so we're always assessing our strategies as to how to overcome these challenges," he explains.

Truly, much like many companies, finding the best talent continues to be a top priority for Duka; if not to keep the company stable, but to ensure the company is ready to handle incoming changes to the Condo Act which could soon see companies like his beholden to higher industry standards. In addition to staff training and awarding promotions from within, the team takes a proactive approach to its staffing plans.

“We’re at an advantage because for all the condo developments that are being developed by our clients (the developers), we know when they’re going to be occupied so we hold an advantage and are prepared to decide who to hire, and decide who will be the right person for a certain location and type of property,” explains Nani.

That, however, is for the projects Duka can see coming down the pipe. In order to be ready to provide service at the drop of a hat, Duka is always on the lookout for new talent and performs regular staff assessments to pair its team members with the appropriate projects.

“Our regional managers conduct frequent interviews and we categorize the skills of the managers for whatever type of building we have, whether it’s an old building, a new building, a residential, one building, or a cluster portfolio,” he says, adding, “We have to be ready for anything.”

MOVING AHEAD

Integrity. Diversity. Comprehensive care. These are the values upon which Altin Nani first founded Duka Property Management, and the ideals that continue to fuel its success. And with activity increasing on all fronts, and Duka eyeing even grander moves in its near future, growth is inevitable.

“Our company has experienced quite a boom between 2006 to now. Eventually, I can see this company growing even more. Not only because we have good staff, but because we have a good strategy and we maintain a healthy reputation,” says Chan.

Growth, however, is not the main goal. Speaking to the company’s core vision, Sijakovic declares, “We don’t want to just be the biggest, we want to be the best. We really believe that.”

Looking ahead, Nani says he’s thankful for the success his team has afforded him, and anticipates celebrating many more milestones in the company’s future. “Considering the time frame, the size that we are, and the stability we have, I can say I’m really grateful.” ■



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