



reinvesting in America

by Nancy Pekala

Volunteerism is back in vogue.

Americans clearly want to make a difference today. Following the tragic events of last September 11, many people have reassessed their lives and decided to make some changes. They want to put back the meaning in their lives, to give back to their communities and to reinvest in their country.

Echoing his father's "point of light" speech, President Bush, during his State of the Union address earlier this year, urged Americans to spend two years in the service of others. He acknowledged that the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States caused Americans to look in the mirror and remember their obligations to each other, the country and history. Now is the time to act, he said.

"My call is for every American to commit at least two years,—4,000 hours over the rest of your lifetime—to the service of your neighbors and your nation," Bush said. "For too long our culture has said, 'If

it feels good, do it.' America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self."

Making a Difference

Both individuals and businesses are responding to this call for service by volunteering in a wide variety of organizations. Indeed, according to Network For Good, an independent organization whose goal it is to foster use of the Internet for civic participation and philanthropy, 109 million American adults volunteer annually—that's 56 percent of all adults. In addition, volunteers contribute an average of 3.5 hours per week, totaling 20 billion hours with an estimated dollar value of \$225 billion.

Industry Alms Back

While individuals have always given of their time to worthy causes, volunteering is a rather new phenomenon for some businesses and industries.

For example, historically the real estate industry has not been known for its volunteer efforts. But that is changing. Real estate, like many other industries, is demonstrating its commitment to give back to the community in ways it knows best.

One unique example of this commitment is the REstart program (www.restartprogram.org). In 1998, members of the San Diego chapter of IREM became concerned that spiraling housing costs, combined with welfare reform, would put many families on the street. Thus, the REstart program was established as a way to give a new start in life to those in need through real estate management. The organization was created by real estate professionals who are using education, training and networking to train disadvantaged single parents for a new start in life through real estate.

Co-founders Lauri Greenblatt, CPM®, and Linda Lewis developed

the model of a teaching program that would allow these parents to train and intern as apartment managers, thus providing them with free or low-cost housing and a career. REstart is a program of the Bobby Jo Lewis Foundation, which is named for Bobby Jo Lewis, who, along with her mother Alice, lost her life to domestic violence. Its overall purpose is to give a new start in life to those whose lives have been affected by domestic violence, substance abuse and poverty.

The struggle for low- and even moderate-income families has intensified as housing costs, always high, began to skyrocket in the second half of the 1990s. Currently, San Diego has the least affordable housing in Southern California, according to the State Board of REALTORS, and only 23 percent of its residents can afford to buy a home, according to the San Diego Housing Commission.

Greenblatt, who not only is president of the Bobby Jo Lewis Foundation and founder of the REstart program but also is a principal and cofounder of Promus Management, related that she initially became interested in developing such a program following a personal experience she had with a friend who became disabled while pregnant.

"When she was in the hospital giving birth to her son, the father of her child came and told her he was leaving her for another woman," explained Greenblatt. "She was an orphan, had no family and needed a job. I ended up giving her a job as an apartment manager. It began to occur to me that other women in this situation could benefit from the opportunity."

The REstart founder also acknowledged that the time she has invested volunteering for the program has been well spent and that the experience has been rewarding. "We have

must be at least 18 years of age; have a high school diploma or the equivalent; have no record of misdemeanors, theft or embezzlement; have basic people skills and common



Last November, REstart committee members got together at the program's second annual retreat.

had some really amazing stories of students who turned their lives around," Greenblatt explained. She cited the case of one student, Susan Johnson, who last year earned an IREM scholarship and is now taking courses to earn her CPM and RPA designations. "I have no doubt she will be a CPM in a few years," she said. "She has got the drive."

Program Outreach

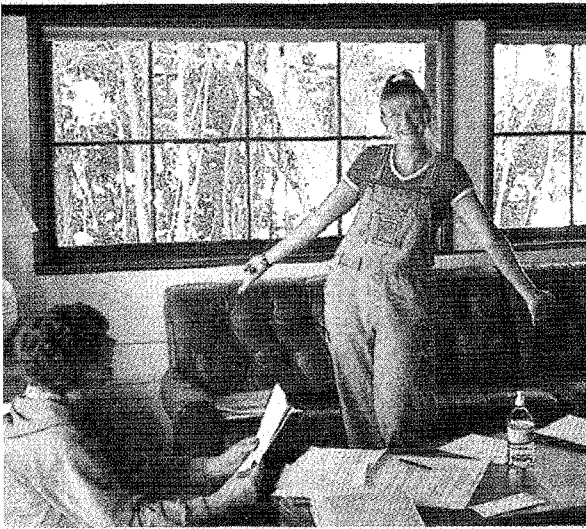
REstart works collaboratively with community service organizations committed to the needs of its target groups. Program participants are generally single parents who, due to substance abuse, domestic violence or poor life choices, are homeless and who need a job and a home for their children. In order to be a candidate for the program, applicants

sense and, if there is a history of substance abuse, must be able to show a minimum of one year of sobriety.

Once students are accepted into the program, they begin a rigorous 10-week classroom training program under the supervision of IREM instructors. Students are trained in the following areas: IREM's RES201 course on apartment management; ethics; fair housing; business etiquette; self defense; personal finance; professional demeanor; landlord/tenant law and job shadowing/internship.

Having completed classroom training and job shadowing, and having passed a written test, students enter a full-time, one-month internship under the supervision of experienced property management staff. During the entire program, stu-

REstart Makes a Difference In Graduates' Lives



Susan Johnson, (center), a REstart graduate and CPM® candidate, now mentors other students.

Pamela's* Story

Pamela grew up one of three children in an affluent family headed by an alcoholic father.

Unfortunately, Pamela fell prey to the same demons that haunted her father and spent 10 years in a haze of drug and alcohol abuse. She lost physical custody of her three children and hit bottom for seven months. Living in her car, despondent and convinced she would never regain custody of her children, Pamela faced a turning point one day as she sat overlooking the cliffs of Cardiff State Beach. "I decided I had nothing to live for and might as well drive my car off the cliff," she recalls today. She was stayed from this course by the thought of her children and how much they needed her.

"I called the Family Recovery Center and asked to be admitted," says Pamela. "They told me there weren't any beds. I asked them, since I was living in my car anyway, if they would let me live in my car in their parking lot." They did, and two days later Pamela was admitted into the

treatment facility. Later, she was accepted into REstart and began 10 weeks of intensive training.

Today, after graduating from the REstart program, Pamela has regained custody of one of her children and is working on the custody of the other two. She works full-time for a large management firm as an administrative assistant and has also applied to become an onsite resident manager. She has had 13 traffic warrants and four criminal convictions expunged and has a clean record. "I even love sitting in traffic on the way home," she says. "It makes me feel like a part of society."

"REstart helped me to set some standards for living in my life."

Pamela is in the process of obtaining a certificate as a Certified Occupancy Specialist. She has identified an even bigger goal for herself. "I always had a dream of being an attorney," she says, "and I plan to become a landlord-tenant attorney. That way I can continue to work in the industry." Pamela also plans to use her experiences and her strength to inspire other women who may follow in her footsteps as a member of the REstart Mentor Committee.

Susan's Story

On September 9, 1999, Susan Johnson successfully graduated from the 10-week REstart program after being given her first taste of residential and commercial real estate management via an internship at

Sunrise Management. Just two months later in November 1999, she entered the real estate field full-time as she began work for Investors Property Management Group. Today, she works as a property manager for the company and is responsible for managing both residential and commercial real estate. Currently a CPM® Candidate, she earned a national IREM scholarship last year and is pursuing achievement of the CPM designation. In addition, she is taking classes towards her RPA designation.

"When I interned at Sunrise Management as part of the REstart program, I found that I really enjoyed property management," Johnson said. "It was one of those things that I sort of just fell into but once I become involved in it, there was no looking back."

She added that the REstart program was a good experience for her. "It was good to be around the kind of people who are involved in the program. They act not only as mentors and teachers, but also as role models. They helped me to set some standards for living in my life."

Johnson, who now serves as a REstart mentor, said she appreciated the fact that the program is based on a solid foundation of education and follow-up. "I found it all to be very interesting and exciting," she said. "I never lost interest and it was a great change for me."

**Name Changed*

dents experience two full months of the management cycle.

Top Moments of the Year

Key to the success of the program is REstart's teachers and volunteers, as well as its unique job shadowing/internship component. The program utilizes a core group of IREM faculty members, volunteer instructors who possess specific knowledge in their presentation topic, and job shadowing/internship hosts who possess an appropriate level of education and experience.

The purpose of the job shadowing and internship component of the REstart program is to expose the students to a professional property management industry atmosphere. Hosts are identified based on specific standards set by the REstart steering committee and are provided the training necessary to successfully host the students.

"The two coolest things about this program has been watching the students blossom and the response we've received from the industry," Greenblatt said. "Each class requires more than 2,000 hours of volunteer time, yet we have a waiting list of people who want to volunteer."

While acknowledging that the real estate industry is not known primarily for its good works in the community, Greenblatt said, "Even though we are all very busy, we still want to give back. When you combine that idea with the kind of work we do, volunteering for this program is a no brainer. We're doing something we know how to do and helping others in the process."

Providing the Experience

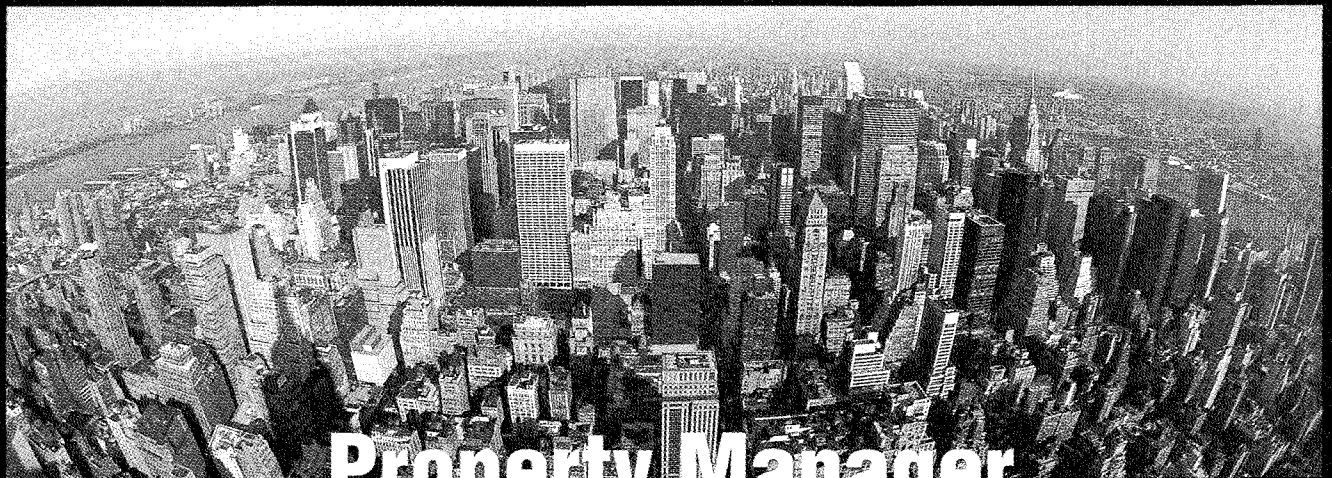
For her husband, Joseph Greenblatt, CPM and an IREM instructor, the REstart program offered a unique teaching challenge. "This is not your

traditional student population," he explained. "This was an opportunity to take the skills you've honed over many years and use them to help others."

Moreover, because the REstart program involves teaching students over an extended period of time, Mr. Greenblatt noted that "one of the most gratifying elements of this experience is to watch the attitudinal and emotional evolution of the students. You can see them coming out of their shell gradually. To experience that with another human being is very rewarding. It's like fast forward parenting. You see them grow over a period of weeks and watch as they literally bootstrap their lives."

He explained that all too often, the property manager's job involves telling people "no" all day. "We tell people 'No, we won't allow you to pay your rent late. No, we're not going to do those tenant improvements for you. No, we're not going

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REstart Fast Facts

- Developed in 1998, the program conducted its first class in 1999.
- To date, five classes have been completed (the sixth began last month) and 50 students have successfully graduated from the program.
- Approximately 65 percent of graduates were employed in the real estate management industry one year after graduation.
- Each class requires more than 2,000 volunteer hours. In like-kind donations, that equates to \$20,000 of volunteer time for the classes alone.
- Susan Johnson, one of REstart's first graduates, earned an IREM national scholarship and is presently taking courses towards her CPM and RPA designations.
- To date, the program has received about \$35,000 in private grants and donations.
- The program has been staffed and run entirely by volunteers.

to let you put that sign up.' We get beat up by our clients for a living. Participating in REstart is a real opportunity to do something that is heartwarming. That is rare because we are not in a business that is loaded with altruistic opportunities."

Mr. Greenblatt, who is principal and executive vice president of Sunrise Management, AMO® and a principal in Promus Management, explained that the volunteer opportunities provided by REstart are a perfect fit for the real estate industry. Noting that Sunrise Management was one of the first intern sites for the program, he explained that "as an employer, this program gives you a free look at prospective employees. You get exposure to these individuals over time and can see firsthand their commitment to learning and improving themselves. REstart graduates have turned out to be some of the most loyal employees anyone could ever hope for because they are truly grateful for the opportunity."

Theresa Amos turned out to be one of those employees for Sunrise. "She interned for us as part of the program and then later returned to work for us full-time. When she started, she couldn't look you in the eye because she was so nervous. Now, she is very poised and has set goals for herself. It's personally gratifying for me because every day I can see her and know that I helped this human being be here, contributing to our company and society. It's an awesome feeling."

Just as important, Mr. Greenblatt noted, involvement in the REstart program has demonstrated to both his employees and clients that his company is committed to giving back to the community.

Foundation of Support

The success of the REstart program has attracted a lot of interest and support. Last May, the IREM Foundation honored the program with its first ever Community Service Award. It also provided a \$2,500 cash award, which was used to help the Bobby Jo Lewis Foundation with developmental costs. In addition, the IREM Foundation Board of Directors agreed to support and endorse the REstart program by taking some specific actions including: allocating funds to assist two chapters in developing the program; preparing grant requests that can be used to solicit other foundations and corporations; and establishing a coalition committee to evaluate the program's progress.

Looking ahead, it is hoped that the REstart program will expand to cities across the United States. As Lauri Greenblatt noted, since the program began in 1998, "It's grown beyond our expectations. Now that it's become a reality, it's very exciting. We hope to expand into other cities. Right now, the Minnesota, San Francisco and Orange County chapters of IREM are very interested in signing on for the program."

At present, the REstart team is working to package the program in a way that it can be easily exported to other chapters and organizations.

"It's really amazing to see the results of our efforts," acknowledged Ms. Greenblatt. "Property management is a challenging business, and we don't always have a lot of rewards. This is something tangible that really turns lives around. As an industry, it's good for us."

Nancy Pekala is Managing Editor of the *Journal of Property Management*.