

Eastport Moves in New, Old Directions

By Joe Clements

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WALTHAM, MA — One of Greater Boston's more prolific commercial real estate investors is about to pick it up a notch—but that's only part of the story for Eastport Real Estate Services. The firm has also hired a new president from Carruth Capital, Robert Bowen, a property management veteran who will seek to expand that element of Eastport's platform.

"It's a great opportunity," Bowen tells GlobeSt.com. "I feel charged." Eastport founder Michael Price says the energy is contagious, with the change enabling him to launch a separate operation, Legacy Real Estate Ventures. The acquisition and development firm will be situated at 318 Bear Hill Rd., which happens to be the first property Eastport purchased. A self-avowed "perfectionist," Price stresses the selection was made carefully, but says he feels liberated by Bowen's arrival.

"Eastport all of a sudden can focus even more strongly on the service side and can do a really good job managing, and turning the reins over allows me to concentrate on what I love, which is acquisitions," says Price, who will remain a principal at the company he started 13 years ago with partners Mark and Richard Connaughton. The one million sf under management is split between third-party clients and Eastport's own portfolio, and encompasses a range of multifamily, office and retail space. Properties secured by Legacy will be fed to the Eastport management pool, but Bowen will also be scoping out new third-party business independent of that source.

"We will definitely be working to grow the fee-management profitability," says Bowen, who started in the early 1990s at legendary Boston firm Leggat McCall Properties, then spent time at another old-line operation, Whittier Partners, which today is CBRE/New England. The stint at Carruth Capital lasted nearly 10 years, helping the Westborough-based landlord maintain a dominant position in the MetroWest. Still familiarizing himself with Eastport's tenants and buildings, Bowen says he believes his experience in property management will assist the firm as it strives to "reach the next level." Although Price will wait until the first week of 2008 to officially start Legacy, he says he is eager to get the acquisitions campaign underway as well.



Harborview Place

"It's a great time to be in the market," reports Price, who will continue to focus on small- and mid-sized investments, mostly in the \$10 million and under category. "That has worked out well so far," says Price, who places capital on behalf of private investors, often "family and friends" who have enabled Eastport to secure an impressive fiefdom of properties in eastern Massachusetts. Besides the standard commercial real estate product, Eastport has also owned and developed such properties as child care centers, a data center and medical office buildings in downtown Boston and the suburbs.

Whereas Eastport leaned on the conservative side, Legacy will be willing to take on more risks, says Price, possibly accepting a measure of vacancy or properties requiring renovations or repositioning. The firm is steering clear of Downtown Boston, he says, with the deals presently "too expensive," but Legacy will generally keep within its traditional barriers inside the Interstate 495 belt, he says. Not only is it familiar territory, Price says the company's track record is known. "We bring a sophisticated approach, and sellers like that," he says. "They know I can get it done, and that we do what we say we will." And while hoping to continue using traditional capital sources, the firm will also explore larger deals with institutional money when appropriate, adds Price.

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