
Veteran retail brokers launch new firm

By: Eddie Baeb August 04, 2011

(Crain's) — Veteran retail real estate brokers Todd Cabanban, Marc Rubin and Kyle Mayberry have formed a new firm with a roster of retailers brought over from their former company, Zifkin Realty Group LLC.

The three launched Chicago-based Cabanban Rubin & Mayberry Commercial Realty last month and hope to seize opportunities in a tumultuous market and capitalize on their experience working in a now-hot sector: dollar stores and discounters. They currently work for the chains Dollar Tree Inc. and Sears Outlet and pawn shop Cash America International Inc.

“With our discount guys, we’ve always done a decent amount of transactions for them,” says Mr. Cabanban, 45. “But over the last two, three years, they’ve really accelerated their appetite for deals, simply because their sales have been so good. And more owners are willing to look at our ideas. There were some owners before who wouldn’t even look at us.”

Mr. Cabanban and Mr. Rubin, 41, first met as brokers at Hiffman Shaffer Associates in the mid-'90s, where the retail brokerage practice was then led by Ed Zifkin. The two jumped from HSA to help Mr. Zifkin co-found his Chicago firm in 1998.

They decided to head out on their own so they could call their own shots, and also because they believe it's best nowadays to either be a lean, focused boutique or be part of a big, global operation rather than a mid-sized firm.

“It was just kind of a good time to take a breath and reload,” Mr. Rubin says. “It feels like if you're not the big guy, able to get national referrals, then you've got to be smaller and keep your costs down and be more entrepreneurial. In that middle space, you're kind of not either.”

Because they have a roster of existing clients, which includes Noodles & Co. and Binny's Beverage Depot on the tenant side as well as Oak Brook-based Inland Western Retail Real Trust Inc. on the landlord side, the big challenge will be to pick up new tenants — at a time when few retailers are expanding.

“There's still some opportunity in the Chicago market with new retailers coming that they could pick up,” says Barry Schain, a principal with Lake Zurich-based Center Creek Development, which is vying to develop a new outlet center in southwest suburban New Lenox. “There's also going to be changing ownership, as banks stabilize. There's going to be more asset sales.”

The three, all principals with the new firm, like their chances to win new business, even going up against giants like CB Richard Ellis Inc. and Cushman & Wakefield Inc., which recently brought on a new Chicago-area retail team as the firm pushes to improve its local operation.

“We've set ourselves up to compete with the bigger companies,” Mr. Rubin says. “I think we'll be very competitive.”

Mr. Rubin is a Wilmette native who graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Madison with a degree in real estate and technology. He did a short stint at Skokie-based Taxman Corp. before joining HSA.

Mr. Cabanban grew up in Evanston and earned a fine arts degree in filmmaking at Indiana University. He caught the real estate bug from his father, a longtime executive with Sears, Roebuck and Co. who owned apartment buildings around the University of Illinois at Chicago campus as a side business.

Mr. Mayberry, 31, is a Minnesota native who graduated from Iowa State University in 2002 with a degree in marketing and advertising. He spent a year selling Yellow Pages ads, where he “built some tough skin” before joining Zifkin.

The three managed to part their former firm on good terms.

“They’re highly regarded, hardworking guys,” Mr. Zifkin says. “They’re at the prime of their careers. If they’re going to start their own business, this is really the time for them to do it.”

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