



Getting it done

CCR's first Virtual Women's Retreat hones in on the construction game today



2020
WOMEN
IN COMMERCIAL
CONSTRUCTION
& FACILITIES

“Is everyone ready? Let's go.” That is not the way attendees of a *Commercial Construction & Renovation* Women's Retreat typically get the ball rolling, but in these unprecedented, pandemically driven times, it is where we are.

That just made the virtual Zoom Retreat even more interesting, as even though the gathering lacked one of those patented CCR networking adventures, the depth and intensity of the discussion was even more vibrant.

So, as we launched our first Virtual Women's Retreat, 13 vendors and end-users from around the industry jumped into the mix, offering keen insights into how they are faring today, why what we do is so essential and how their forays into the industry began.

The gathering, sponsored by *Commercial Construction & Renovation*, was held over a two-day period in August via Zoom. Here is a snapshot of our conversation.



BARRY'S

Jennifer Brown

Designer



Deborah Delaney

Associate VP, Design & Construction



SUBWAY

Cheryl Green

Development Manager



Amy Hodgson

Project Mgr/Bus Development



Kelly Lee

Marketing Director



IRVINE COMPANY

Amber Matas

Tenant Coordinator



Choctaw
Shopping Center
Enterprise

Diane Maxwell

General Manager



SUBWAY

Abbie Muto

President



Jennifer Ngo

Senior Manager Store Development



Juleen Russell

AIA, Principal



Danielle Scharf

Sales Manager



Christine Smith

Construction Coor



Seed to Flower

Lynn Young

Construction Liason

CCR: Tell us a little about the adjustments you have had to make during the pandemic?

Lynn Young, Seed to Flower: For me, I've learned to use possible difficulties due to the pandemic as a way to re-connect with companies that I've worked with in the past and meet new people within the cannabis industry. Dispensaries have made many adjustments as far as their retail operation and how they accommodate customers during the pandemic.

There are some challenges, but most dispensaries have adapted well by incorporating new protocols. It is not a smooth process, but it is one cannabis retail stores are getting accustomed to. The customers are not complaining as much about the COVID process. Adjustments such as pre-ordering, curbside pickup and mapping the appropriate social distancing on floors and outside wait lines are working for many customers.

One of the drawbacks due to the pandemic is limited access to products. Many dispensaries are designed to create an engaging environment between the customers and products. Due to strict regulations and safety pre-cautions, products are not accessible to customers directly. Budtenders/associates are facilitating the handling of bud pods and you can experience the product and selection under these types' protocols. You cannot touch and feel like you used to and pull the display to your nose.

We are really trying to think about the customer experience from a safety perspective. How does it change the path and the design of a retail environment?

— Design Construction's Deborah Delaney

Those are interruptions that can be a drawback for a new customer. You don't quite know the product, so those are some small things we have been adjusting to. A lot of new construction projects have been placed on hold in LA due to COVID, while in-progress projects prior to the pandemic are wrapping up according to pandemic guidelines.

There will continue to be adjustments. I think as we get farther along and we see how things play out, we will need to make more adjustments. In California, we were pulled back a little bit to a Phase 2, so things are not opening how people would like.

As far as the future, I think it would be a great idea to plan ahead, and incorporate new ideas and concepts that can deal with future outbreaks or pandemics. Nobody was prepared for COVID to hit, especially at this magnitude. Everyone was caught with their hands up.

On a personal level, many of us have been impacted because we know people in our family who have gotten COVID—some are no

longer with us. On the business level, we have to re-think the way we may have to do business on a large scale because of our client base. We are in the servicing business, so thinking ahead about preventive measures is critical. A lot of cannabis operations were deemed essential businesses because of their medicinal benefits.

Diane Wanoka Maxwell, Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise: Prior to the pandemic, we were working with a retail recruiting firm to pull in retailers to the reservation. We are located in a smaller town in East Central Mississippi, so the pandemic has slowed that a bit. In the last couple of months, we have seen more interest. We are located a mile from our Tribe's two casinos. We have three that have opened back up recently and the traffic has been unreal. People were waiting for the casino's to reopen, so we are hoping that the influx of customers boosts our Tribal economy and brings in new business.

During the pandemic, we worked with our tenants to provide information from the Small Business Administration and other government programs that may help them stay afloat. That became part of my job during this challenging time.

CCR: Did the reservation follow the same mandates as businesses outside of the reservation?

Choctaw Shopping Center's Maxwell: Yes, and some more stringent. The Tribe is a separate jurisdiction, so we can set our own guidelines. Our casinos were closed. The State of Mississippi opened their casinos, located on the coast before we did. We stayed closed because our area was a hot spot. We lost a lot of people in our tribal community, COVID-19 hit the reservation hard. We stayed closed longer than our surrounding communities. We still require masks for everyone here. Our Tribal schools are closed down, whereas in town, the public schools were open. We have greater safety protocols.

Deborah Delaney, Design Construction: All of our stores are open in Canada. I know that Canadian Tire was not shut down because we were essential for some time. What I'm seeing now from a design perspective is the rethinking of the path of the customer experience. What can we do to make them feel safe within our stores? We are looking at things like curbside pickup, aka, BOPIS, which is Buy Online, Pickup In Store. We saw a really big bump in online sales, which was good for the company as a whole.

Now, we not only have to reexamine what we have in the stores but also how we design the stores of the future with COVID in mind. That would include a lot of things around sensitivity to touchpoints and wayfinding—not just a visual way, but an audio way, too. We also continue to remind people about the rules, which can be tough. For example, right now, change rooms are not open. That is probably one of the most tangible experiences of the apparel industry. Plus, you have to quarantine all of the clothing with a fitting room. How do we do all of that?

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CCR: What is the square footage of your normal stores?

Design Construction's Delaney: Anywhere from 15,000 square feet to 70,000 square feet, depending on the location, where it is and what type of environment it is in.

CCR: How many stores are in your portfolio?

Design Construction's Delaney: Just over 800. I run a bifurcated group, meaning two separate banners. It is very interesting. There is a lot going on. We still are trying to look in that crystal ball to figure everything out. I have sat in on roundtable discussions with other executives in North America from all the big banners. It is a very supportive environment. Everyone wants retail to survive. To do that, we have to come together.

CCR: Are you wearing masks in Alberta as well?

Design Construction's Delaney: Yes, it is by law across the country. Anywhere where you cannot social distance, you have to wear a mask. Our company has mailed out masks to every employee. We continue to work from home. That is 64,000 people.

Jennifer Brown, Barry's Bootcamp: We are a boutique fitness company. When everything hit, as a designer, I was one of the ones that stayed to help design how to navigate through all of this. With my team furloughed, it was my job to look at our 70 studios around the world (40 in the US) and lay out a plan.

We had treadmills and benches on the floor with everything 6 feet apart. It is interesting because even the treadmills have to be 6 feet apart. It was really a puzzle to figure everything out. We also had to look at the challenge of checking people in and what they had to do while waiting for a class.

We set up places for people to stand while they wait, and that has to be 6 feet apart, too. We have temperature checks. Our lobby used to have a juice bar, but those have been shut down. There is no use for locker rooms, unless people have to use the restroom. You basically go to your bench when you start—either in the front or back row. Everyone has their own bench and their own treadmill. We had to work really hard to figure out a strategy. How do you start on a treadmill and not cross over?

Everyone puts their stuff down and goes to a treadmill or the floor, take the class, and leave the room halfway through—all at 6 feet apart. Next, we come in and clean everything thoroughly. Each studio has to abide by the rules of the states they are in. On average, they can only have 35% capacity. Then, each gym could only have 10 people total.

We had to change the rules, so basically I had to change the plans over and over again. There were lots of things to address: If you could go back to the gym, do you feel safe? What would make you feel safe? We used experts and roundtables to find out. We did constant surveys.

In LA, we found you could work out outside, so I updated the plans for those gyms. The number of participants in the class kept going up and up. In Venice and West Hollywood, we took over a parking lot. We had weight stacks outside. But there were questions. How do you keep things clean? How do you play music and not disturb anyone? There are just so many factors when it comes to fitness.

Juleen Russell, Jencen Architecture: It has been crazy. I think all of us have had similar experiences. Our business relies a lot on construction, and a lot of our clients had to put the brakes on. The good news is that we are seeing things picking up. We have been assisting more clients in the med tel, dentistry and physical therapy areas.

The questions we are facing is how is this going to impact retail long-term. Nobody is sure. We are looking at areas that might have growth potential in this climate, but we also are looking at how to design for this climate. We have to find the best practices.

We are working in conjunction with one of our clients on a new prototype, which incorporates some of the things being done with social distancing and how people shop.

Jennifer Ngo, Lovepop: It has been quite an interesting couple of months. We were impacted in quite a few ways. All of our locations are small footprint and in high-traffic areas—a good example of this is our smallest location, which is roughly 50 square feet at Penn Station in New York City. Closing everything down quickly was an adventure, and we found out just how dedicated our store teams are to make sure that we closed quickly and carefully since we didn't know how long we would be off the ground for.

During the pandemic, we worked with our tenants to provide information from the Small Business Administration and other government programs. This helped them stay afloat. That became part of my job.

— Choctaw Shopping Center's Diane Wanoka Maxwell

In examining what we do going forward, we will invest in getting more of the store team's feedback—they are our eyes and ears on the ground, and it's so important to make sure they are safe and comfortable in our new retail environments.

What we have found through this is that with everyone home, more people are shopping online. If people are going to go back to the retail environment, it better be amazing—better than before. People are going to want to enjoy the physical experience since this is something they're going out of their way to do.

Another thing we are seeing is how people communicate. We are working with our store teams to enhance our previously high-touch environments, whether it be guards for our products, floor decals, etc. We also are doing our best to keep in touch with everyone, whether it be our furloughed store teams, landlords in our closed properties, and our design and build vendors. We're all in this together, even if we are not quite doing anything yet.

Amy Hodgson, State Permits: A lot of our retailers and clients are working from home, while we've seen others we've worked with for years get furloughed. Overall, it has been an adjustment. I'm still working from home for the most part, but go back to the office to send plans out. One of the positive things I have seen is that more municipalities are making exceptions and accepting digital submittals or allowing extensions on permits, etc. We are seeing some review times shorten up with so many reviewers working from home, they are getting things done quicker.

Abbie Muto, Subway: Primarily, we are in the retail/restaurant business. Being in that business, all of the franchise owners are considered essential employees. It was really important from the beginning to understand what we needed to do to not only protect the customers who were coming in the restaurants, but also to protect our Franchisees and their employees. That required us to learn on the fly what we could creatively do, in the restaurants, to create barriers. This was before plexiglass shields and 6-foot social distancing became a thing.

We are really trying to think about the customer experience from a safety perspective. How does it change the path and the design of a retail environment?

— Lovepop's Jennifer Ngo

We were using painter's tape on the floor to mark X's to get people socially distanced. We were moving all of our tables and chairs because the dining rooms had to be closed. We had to make sure people would not sit at the tables. We used empty tables in front of the sandwich unit (counter) to create 6 feet of distance between customers and employees. That was all in the beginning. It was so raw and on the fly. We were figuring out how to survive and remain open as an essential business.

That absorbed a lot of our time initially. We also had to review all of the government programs that were available to small business owners so we could educate our franchise owners. We are in Pennsylvania, so we were initially considered a hot spot. Our state closed down earlier with shelter orders and stayed closed longer than many others.

How do you survive this as a retail business? Operationally, we had to make a lot of changes. We had to make sure our franchise owners were protecting their food when business dropped off, adjusting hours of operation during shelter in place was critical to controlling labor cost and altering menus was critical to controlling food cost. Keeping customers safe and protecting Franchisees and their investment was critically important. It is just amazing how many levels something like this touches when it happens.

There was no playbook for the pandemic. We all had to develop and create our playbooks on the fly and figure it out as we went, step by step. When we thought we had the playbook figured out, things changed and we had to turn around and throw it out. I think it speaks to being able to be very creative and roll with things—learn as much as you can to make smart decisions for everyone involved.

Cheryl Green, Subway: I handle two parts of the business, mainly leasing and construction. On the leasing side, the main goal was rent reductions from landlords. That was pretty much my huge project when worked from home for six weeks during the heat of COVID. On the construction side, all the goals changed. We had a long list of stores ready to remodel to the new, Fresh Start décor. Then, when COVID hit, everybody pretty much put a hold on it, except for those projects that were already underway.

In some cases, we had equipment orders that were already in process, so I am emailing the manufacturer saying, "Stop, stop, stop. Don't deliver these orders." But I could not stop them all and in one case we had a tractor trailer full of equipment delivered to a Walmart Subway on the same day the governor shut down construction. Due to the governor's mandate, the franchisee had already removed his seating making all restaurants takeout only, so that was another hurdle we had to face.

Another problem we encountered was a major relocation that was already in the works. It was a PennDOT, eminent domain situation, whereas PennDOT was taking over our existing location and we had no choice but to relocate. The equipment was ordered and before the contractors could start, the construction ban went into place.

This became a huge problem because when the construction ban was lifted several weeks later, the general contractors, who based out-of-state, could not find local subcontractors that delayed the project even more. Also, the township was closed, so we could not get inspections. There were so many different factors that we could not predict. After the construction ban was lifted, I went to an onsite construction meeting where nobody was wearing masks. It was uncomfortable.

After that, we started doing virtual construction, walk-throughs on Zoom. They turned the camera around and walked me around the store. There was just so many things changing it was mind-blowing.

CCR: Did you ask the subcontractors to wear a mask?

Subway's Green: I did beforehand, and I did at the jobsite. The landlord just refused to wear a mask, so I stayed 10 feet away. It was definitely a meeting we had to do in person because of a code issue.

Christine Smith, Cedar Realty Trust: We are spread out over several states. We are headquartered on Long Island, New York, and have properties in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Delaware, Maryland and Washington DC. Each state has different guidelines and restrictions, so we had to adapt to those and keep track of every changing phase. Fortunately for us, we are primarily grocery-anchored shopping centers, so we saw a new definition of "essential retail."

We had several projects underway that we had to shut down due to government mandates. We had to readjust and shift things, given the fact that construction was temporarily shut down in most of the states where we were working.

Permits and inspections were affected as municipalities were shut down and which pushed back some timelines, so we adapted and adjusted. We did not have any tenants back out of projects that were underway. We had some tenants reconsider the project, or adjust timing sensibly.

CCR: What was the biggest fear you found?

Cedar Realty Trust's Smith: That they would not open. There are some restaurants, gyms and indoor adventure parks in our centers. We have an Urban Air Adventure park in progress right now that is eager to get completed and open. The main concern was the tenants that could not open or reopen due to COVID. In some cases they needed assistance to survive.

Danielle Scharf, Branded Group: The pandemic has been transformative for sure. We have helped our clients navigate through the challenges of closing temporarily or being closed permanently, while also reopening locations with new protocols. How do we handle that? Along with assisting our clients in increasing their janitorial services or adding janitorial services, we have been successful in assisting with specialized services—things like defogging and extra services like ATM wipe downs. We have also assisted our clients with additional filter changes, plexiglass installs, markers, and installations of sanitizing stations.

We have seen a transformation in the construction world as well. Instead of being the new builds, the vanilla shells, and the remodels, we have seen more decommissioning locations, or providing new tenants with less customized units. We have seen more property owners just trying to get new tenants in after the current tenant left the keys on short notice.

Kimberly Lee, Inspector.com: In our ever-changing world, it is essential to continuously grow and adapt to your own needs and the needs of your customers. Businesses and service providers must work smarter and be more efficient, focus on being eco-friendly, and more recently are being encouraged to practice social distancing. Inspected provides virtual inspection software built for Inspectors, contractors and private providers of inspection services.

Inspected is gaining national recognition, and implementing compliance provisions to standardize virtual inspections through Inspected.com. Our software creates a centralized hub to help government agencies and cities to promote a safe workplace, focus on the health and safety of workers, and keep projects moving.

Inspected.com is a dedicated platform built specifically for inspectors, contractors, and private inspection service providers which automatically geotags a physical address to the inspection location while including high-quality video and images, and scheduling of time slots for the inspector and contractor. It can all be integrated into your current permitting software. Cloud-based software with an unmatched platform for scheduling, high-quality video, images, notes, and automatic geotagging built specifically for Inspections.

Amber Matas, Irvine Company: In terms of what we have been most focused on in retail, we have some unique challenges in tenant coordination as well as operations. The operations team had a lot of heavy lifting to be able to rework parking lots in order to have outside dining and accommodate curbside service. We have to make it a warm and personable place that people want to go out to and feel safe in.

As we have talked about, wayfinding has been huge through the pandemic. Leasing has been hard at work, keeping tenants engaged and continuing talks and deals. Forward motion has been high on everyone's list, specifically tenant coordination. How can we assist those tenants that were mid construction, in design or permitting moving forward and engaged?

The questions we are facing is how is this going to impact retail long-term. Nobody is sure. We are looking at areas that might have growth potential in this climate.

— Jencen Architecture's Juleen Russell

We had construction projects delayed because other companies were shut down. We were not getting raw material on site for construction, and the landlord work side of things affected development plans moving forward. What things are we going to go ahead with? What things are not going to go ahead? Truly, for us, I think it was maintaining the connection in the community. All our centers stayed open. They were all deemed essential. They are all outdoor, open-air centers, so we did not specifically close the centers like some covered malls and other developers might have through this.

Businesses within those centers may have been closed, depending on the state regulations. We have been working with the tenants to try and weather the storm and keep occupancy up. Unfortunately, there are going to be businesses that don't make it through this. We are trying to anticipate how can we make entry to market for new tenants easier. How can we help a business that is ready to start? How can we make it easier for them to open that first store or restaurant?

It has been a really creative time for everyone to try and brainstorm, to think about how to keep things moving forward and how to future-proof this.

CCR: What is the biggest item on your to-do list?

The Irvine Company's Matas: Highest on my to-do list is to keep my team supported. We all have more on our plate than ever before in an environment that is totally new to the world. If my team

has what they need to execute on a high level, then our end user is getting the service they need to stay successful.

Inspector.com's Lee: Inspected was launched in March 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our No. 1 priority is to protect public and private employees conducting in-person inspections on job sites, as well as commercial and residential properties.

The Inspected app, available on the iOS App Store and Google Play Store, allows building officials and inspectors to conduct virtual inspections while practicing social distancing, saving time, equipment-wear and fuel costs. Inspected also streamlines paperwork, helps meet project deadlines and reduces delays caused by the new guidelines due to the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Jencen Architecture's Russell: It is brainstorming for one of our longest-term clients and helping future-proof the business. With the built-environment changing, we have to design for that. Most of our company is in brainstorm mode now. We need to think outside the box.

Seed to Flower's Young: I have been taking the time and advantage of COVID to slow things down a bit—to rethink about the gaps in the cannabis industry. What is being overlooked? What is being underserved? I have added services and rebranded myself a bit based off that.

In LA, we found you could work out outside, so I updated the plans for those gyms. But there were questions. How do you keep things clean? How do you play music and not disturb anyone?

— Barry's Bootcamp's Jennifer Brown

I also want to go after the facility management component of cannabis dispensaries. They are unknowledgeable about how that works.

COVID also gave me the opportunity to work with the mom-and-pop stores—ones that are not so flamboyant or popular. Cannabis is really about the culture. They ride off of that and put that into their design aesthetic. I want to touch base with existing clients and meeting new friends. We need to start thinking about renovation more. We think about the big picture and that fast moving train. Too many stores are outdated. They need alternatives as how they can upgrade and be unique and creative. They have to learn to drive traffic.

So I want to help rebrand and reshape the way people are doing business in cannabis as a whole. It's kind of predatory, and I want to make it more inclusive to people in different type of dispensaries.

Barry's Bootcamp's Brown: My to-do list is different than everyone else here. I went through this restructuring of the Barry's studios, watching the company do wonderful things and sort of crash. I come from the fashion retail world in New York City. From there, I moved to LA, shifting over to fitness, which was the wave of the future. Now, with COVID and the pandemic, you have to take a step back and say, "Where can I best utilize my skillset? What type of job? Where can I make a difference?" With Barry's, I was up to the challenge, looking at different ways I could redesign to help people and make a difference to people wanting to work out. They could do it safely. I want to move forward next into food service. So where might I be able to help?

Design Construction's Delaney: I have a heavy responsibility to set up my team for success. They know what they are doing, and I just need to understand the role of the project manager and what that looks like. It is about finding the fine line between the virtual side of things, which is very exciting.

Choctaw Shopping Center's Maxwell: The main thing on my list right now would be to keep the tenant relationships going and assist them with staying in business, whether by rent deferral or helping them to market. That leads to traffic in our area and possibly adding businesses with different companies.

Lovepop's Ngo: The biggest thing on my to-do list is to keep learning. We are a young retailer, so I am always trying to learn things from the established retailers in the industry. We are always learning new processes and making new connections so we can be as efficient as possible. This time in particular is so interesting—no one has ever had to build through such an uncertain time like this before, so it is important to learn as much as possible and stay agile.

State Permits' Hodgson: One item on my to-do list is to begin learning and working on new types of projects so we can add additional services for our existing and upcoming clients. We are currently not seeing a whole lot of retailers coming out with large rollouts like we are used to. We are getting requests to quote additional services/ different types of projects. I'm excited to work on these new types of projects and be able to offer these services to upcoming clients.

Subway's Muto: It is focusing on the recovery—to get back to where we were prior to COVID. That is really from a sales perspective. Our company is trying to roll out our curbside programs. Because the typical Subway restaurant is in-line, drive throughs are kicking our butts. So how do we make it safer and more convenient for our customers to still get our food without setting foot inside of a restaurant? Figuring this out will help us pick up some of the losses we sustained as a result of COVID. People's buying patterns and habits are changing. They are not always looking to sit inside a restaurant and eat.

Cedar Realty Trust's Smith: Given all the obstacles that have been thrown at us over the past couple of months, for me, it is

closely tracking all of the projects we have in the pipeline. We are monitoring very closely to meet our landlord turnover date and get our tenants open. There is nothing like getting an email saying that a particular tenant opened throughout the workday or that we delivered a space to a tenant. Just moving the ball a little bit forward each and every day and making a little bit of progress in these challenging times is important.

Subways' Green: My No. 1 priority is rent reductions. During COVID, it was my most important item because of what was going on. It is still going on for us. Sales still have not come back up. It is very important to keep our franchisees sustainable and profitable, or at least in some way break even out of this. Otherwise, we may have store closures. We are looking to preserve the locations and preserve our relationships with our landlords. I am reaching out and doing the best I can to serve our franchisees.

Branded Group's Scharf: For me, it is keeping our clients safe and helping them keep their clients safe. At the end of the day, there are certain things that have to be done.

CCR: What is your story? How did you get started in the industry?

Branded Group's Scharf: I probably have a different start in the industry than most people. I started out in the trade show world representing companies under contract. My experience running tradeshow proved useful, and I was recruited by a national waste organization.

From that point on, I fell in love with the people in the facilities and construction world. I have been here now for about 14 years. It is exciting. There is always something new and different happening—always a challenge. I like how much teamwork there is. At the end of the day, when something needs to get solved, we do it.

Now, I have four kids: 8, 7, 6 and 3. They see a mother working and are encouraged by it. They see that you can do a lot of things as a woman, and that the facilities world is not a man's world. I'm happy that they find interest in it.

Subway's Muto: I live in Pennsylvania. I have lived there my entire life. It is where I went to school. I started at Penn State and finished my degree at East Stroudsburg University. I studied restaurant and hotel management, so I have always been very interested in the retail/restaurant industry. I have been with Subway for 25 years. I started working in full service restaurant management for several years. As much as I love working in that industry, I found it was not conducive to getting married and starting a family.

But I still wanted to be in the business and came across this job in a newspaper ad. They were looking for someone to work for a Subway regional office. It was the best decision I ever made because not only did I work for the company for a long time, but I learned everything from the ground up. It led to me being able to ultimately purchase the business about a year and a half ago. My boss, my mentor, wanted to retire and I purchased the company from him.

It has been a fabulous ride, something I absolutely love. My first year in business for myself was incredibly rewarding and professionally.

I felt like I grew a lot. It was amazing. And then COVID slapped me in the face. It knocked me down several notches. But it is all about learning and what you take away from things. If it does not kill you, it will make you stronger, so I feel it is making me stronger.

I just love this business and I love the brand.

I have been married for 26 years. We have a beautiful 16 year old teenage daughter who just started driving. She turned 16 during quarantine. She is a junior in high school and working to navigate through these challenges. She is now looking at colleges, so there are new developments in our lives. We learned a lot as a family during quarantine.

Keeping customers safe and protecting Franchisees and their investment was critically important. It is just amazing how many levels something like this touches when it happens.

— Subway's Abbie Muto

Jencen Architecture's Russell: I have always been interested in art and was good in math. I thought architecture would be a good thing to do. I went to Clemson, which was unique for someone from Cleveland. Not too many Cleveland folks there, but it was a great experience. I started at Jencen right out of college.

When you go to architecture school, you do not do a lot of retail projects, especially in architecture. That is more of interiors design focus, so it was an interesting place to land. I really love it. I have a big, extended family, and even though I'm an only child, my parents have lots of siblings. They are all business folks. I am artsy, so it has been pretty neat working with mostly chains and developers.

It was a cool revelation. My job has been awesome. I got to travel a lot. I have been all over the United States and North America—Canada, Puerto Rico. I do not have kids, but I have a wonderful guy. He is a firefighter. We have been together for 16 years and have three cats. We live on the lake. Life is good.

Design Construction's Delaney: I feel very, very fortunate in my career. I have a lot of passion for design construction. It came kind of by accident. I was born and raised in England and moved to Canada in my late teens.

Before finding my passion in all things retail, my background is in interior design. I was fortunate enough to be a designer who was able to work in a lot of different disciplines—commercial, residential, corporate—for more than 20 years. But I really honed in on retail. I worked

for T.J. Maxx for some time in Ontario, and then I moved out west, where I worked for Mark's and took over. The trajectory of my career is really merited based on my success within the company, too.

I also taught interior design for a number of years. If there is anything I am known for, it is being a big advocate for women, women in construction and women in leadership roles. I have two children, 16 and 14. They are fantastic and have been amazing through this COVID experience.

The COVID experience also helped me stop and smell the roses. I did a lot of traveling pre-COVID. While we are not slow by any means, I am really offering my services from here. My brain is slower than it was because I am not in 17,000 places at one time.

I'm currently volunteering on a project in Calgary for vulnerable homeless families. It is multi-use church, community center, residential. I am feel like it is a bit of a full circle being able to give back as a volunteer, whether it is mentoring or doing something for the community. That was encouraged by our company as well. If you do not feel like you are giving, look around you. You will find places you can give something back.

I have worked a specific type of retail for about 14 years now. I really enjoy it. I enjoy the challenge. And I don't think it is done. It is just going to be done differently.

Subway's Green: I grew up in Connecticut and went to the University of Rhode Island. I stopped short of a degree to start a family early. Fast-forward, I became a single parent and met my now-husband online in an AOL single parent chatroom. Eleven days later, I drove here. Two months later, I was engaged. Four months later, I moved my family here. Instead of each being single parents of three kids, we became parents of six in an instant. We literally became the Brady Bunch and it was a big adjustment.

That is how I ended up in Pennsylvania. I was jumping around doing different office jobs, temp work kind of things when I first moved here. I applied at a kosher manufacturer in Allentown (Pennsylvania) as a bookkeeper. Then 9/11 happened, and the person who was our production manager went flighty. I took the reins with my boss stuck in Vegas. He could not fly back, so I kind of ran the business. We had trucks trying to get into New York City. They were stuck in the tunnels and could not get through to make their deliveries so I had to handle it. When my boss returned, he respectfully let the production manager go and offered me his job.

Being a production manager was not for me, so a year or so later I applied for a manager's position at a local Subway restaurant. I made it through the first interview and then interviewed with my now former boss, the one before Abbie. He said he did not want me in his Subway store and that I should come to work for him. Seventeen-and-a-half years later, here I am. He taught me everything I know about leasing and I became the leasing coordinator for the territory. A couple years later, I was promoted to development manager. Today, I get the privilege of working for my very good friend who bought the business, Abbie Muto.

It has been a real journey. Right now, my husband and I have four grandkids with one on the way. They range in age from 9 down to 4. It has been great—a weird road, but I am glad I am here.

Cedar Realty Trust's Smith: I'm from New Jersey, grew up here, went to a small women's college in Maryland called Goucher College. I lived in San Diego and Hawaii for a while, and landed back in New Jersey. I started at Ann Klein Factory Stores a long, long time ago as a buyer. After our director of stores resigned, I was asked to get into that end of the business. That is how I ended up in retail construction and facilities.

I worked for a couple of nationwide retail GCs and a couple of retailers, including A.C. Moore, Spencer Gifts and Spirit Halloween. I was recruited for the role I am in now. I was not looking to go anywhere. Everything sort of came full circle—working for a GC in retail facilities and construction, working for a couple of retailers corporate headquarters, and now having the role as a landlord and developer. It was interesting to me, so I took the leap.

I live on the Jersey Shore now. I have two sons, 25 and 21. My youngest is finishing his last year of college, which has been interesting with the COVID restrictions. I work out at 5 a.m. daily during the week. With my gym closed for now, I am finding other ways to work out; outdoors and beach workout classes.

During the quarantine, both kids came back home to live with me. They have been here since March, which is nice. We have had some great quality time together, which is always a bonus.

State Permits' Hodgson: I grew up in Bristol, Wisconsin in Kenosha County. In 2005 I interviewed for an admin assistant position, for a project manager. At that time our office was still located in Racine, Wisconsin. I got the opportunity to move up quickly as we lost an employee and we all pitched in to help pick up his workload. I was introduced into the project management role slowly and began with small simple projects and moved up from there.

In 2008 our company moved to Dodgeville, Wisconsin, which is in the middle of nowhere. At first, I thought there was no way I was going to move up there, but my boss made me a fair offer so I took it. It was only two hours from home, so I took the chance. I am close to my family, so it was a hard decision, but happy I made the move. After 6 months of living here, I met my husband. We got married in 2014, and have two kids and a dog.

COVID definitely has presented its share of challenges, especially with municipalities and clients, etc working from home. During quarantine, it was difficult especially when everybody had to be home and the daycares were closed. It was fun, lots of family time.

Lovepop's Ngo: I grew up in the Boston area. And no, I do not have a Boston accent. I went to Boston University and studied advertising. After I graduated, I started working for startups immediately. I have never had a corporate job. I joined Lovepop as its 10th employee, starting as a district manager.

The first startup I worked for was a food truck restaurant concept in Boston. I was with them for over three years and experienced high growth there, we grew from one food truck to a fleet of five and four brick and mortar restaurants by the time I left.

I joined Lovepop because I wanted to get back into nitty-gritty of things. I like having a lot to do and learning along the way. When you run super-lean teams, you end up being the HR coordinator, the store manager, the facilities maintenance person. It is all a big team effort.

When I interviewed, nobody told me the brand was going to be on “Shark Tank,” so I had three months to get our retail environments in good shape for all of the nationwide coverage. It was a really exciting experience and I relive the night our episode went live often.

After a few months of getting our Boston area operations into shape, I moved to Brooklyn for a year to open our New York market and hired, trained and managed the retail floor teams. It was the first time I had ever left Boston to live somewhere else.

My role started to take on more of an expansion theme when I moved to New York. I was doing a lot of coordination for real estate in the New York area—overseeing the buildout of our new locations there and working closely with our head of retail to make location decisions.

After that, I ended up in the construction realm. As we have grown bigger, we are starting to scale our processes. These days I’m 100% focused on the store development piece, which is really interesting to me. There is so much to absorb. Having limited formal background in the industry has made it easier to break rules and move quickly, as frustrating as that may be for people around me.

The Irvine Company’s Matas: I am in Southern California—born and raised in Orange County. I went to Cal State Fullerton. I started in this industry by accident honestly. I was working for two guys in their early 20s who decided to open a steakhouse. I went from running the restaurant to helping to expand and build the next one, and the next one after that. I was managing the process.

Through the experience, I met a company that did trade show booths and experiential buildouts, store interiors. They offered me a job that sounded interesting and utilized my project management skills and I spent a several years learning everything about fixturing, tradeshow, and retail build outs. I really enjoyed the industry—it was a nice niche, but I wanted to learn more, so I went to a national firm, where I was a program manager and earned the integrated side of development- architecture, design, engineering services and construction management.

After that I spent eight years on the owner’s side managing all things store concepts. Real estate processes like store site selection, overseeing fixture design and rollouts, and buildouts.

At The Irvine Company. I am on the landlord side of things. I have gone full-circle. I think it is a really unique perspective to bring to a developer who is usually always looking at things from the landlord’s side. I can speak to how a tenant might feel and why they react the way they do. It has been really fulfilling.

Seed to Flower’s Young: I was born and raised in Michigan. I went to college in Ohio. I am an only child from a very family-oriented family. I grew up gardening. I actually just finished a master gardening program in LA, so I am really involved in that sort of thing—developing land and permaculture.

I started in property management about 15 years ago by accident. I was working with Girl Scouts of America as an art teacher and they cut the program, so I had to figure out what to do next. Someone said go to real estate school. I hated selling homes, but I fell in love with the property management end. My first job was as an

apartment manager with a low-income housing development. I had a huge portfolio and I received the opportunity to work with the new construction homes. There was a company that partnered with the developer to buy up a lot of the dilapidated properties in Detroit. They tore them down and rebuilt them.

I fell in love with the whole new construction home concept, especially working with developers. From there, my career kept building. I have had the opportunity to build, learn and expand in those areas. I landed into mixed-use properties and I had an opportunity to work with MedMen, just as cannabis became legal. I was an exceptional asset, especially since they did not have all of their practices in place. I was able to take all of my experience and build out the real estate department, developing our facility and management departments from scratch.

The pandemic has been transformative for sure. We have helped our clients navigate through the challenges of closing temporarily or being closed permanently.

— Branded Group’s Danielle Scharf

They did not have one so I had to take ownership. After I left, I became an independent consultant. I have been doing that ever since. With COVID, I have had the opportunity to get in tune with myself, take a break from all of those rigid hours. I used to work from sun up to sundown, 24/7. This has been good time to reassess, re-plan, regroup and be creative.

I am working with two new clients now. Because of COVID, I have had such an overwhelming response to people wanting me to teach them how to garden, how to grow cannabis and all of this stuff. It has blossomed into a whole new service for me. We incorporated that into Seed to Flower.

I also have three boys: 19, 13 and 8.

Choctaw Shopping Center’s Maxwell: I grew in New Mexico and California, but I’ve lived with my Tribe on the Choctaw Indian reservation for approximately 30 years now. My education is on the legal side. I graduated from law school a few years ago, but I am not working in the field. I work as the general manager of the shopping center enterprise, which covers retail, industrial and business space, as well as a couple of convenience stores.

What I like about the job, is that it is very diverse. I have learned a little about things such as: underground storage tanks at our

convenience stores, electricity audits, EPA and the National Archives regulations for businesses that want to come here. I am able to do a lot of what an attorney would do, like write resolutions, negotiate leases, research laws and ordinances in some instances, and present issues to the tribal government body. My goal is to work with my Tribe's attorney general's office, hopefully in the next five years.

I've worked in different areas prior to this position. I spent eight years in the United States Marine Corps Reserve. I was a field radio operator for a while, and then I got transferred to our peacetime/wartime support team. My unit got activated twice.

Prior to this job, I worked for the Tribal housing authority. I have four children. My oldest is a sophomore in college, who is doing the virtual thing like everyone else. I have a middle-school student who is back to school daily. And twin second graders who are on a hybrid schedule and only attend school twice a week at the moment.

I love to learn. I am currently back in school at the University of Oklahoma School of Law, taking online courses. I am getting my legal masters in the L.L.M. program in Indigenous Studies.

As far as the future, I think it would be a great idea to plan ahead, and incorporate new ideas and concepts that can deal with future outbreaks or pandemics.

— Seed to Flower's Lynn Young

Inspector.com's Lee: I am originally from Cape Town, South Africa. I now live in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. At 20, me and a friend got on a boat from Cape Town and sailed to the Caribbean. It was crazy, but we did it. We sailed into St. Martin in the Caribbean and spent a couple of years working on boats and bars, just having fun and traveling. Then Hurricane Louise came through and demolished everything. The bar I was working in as a bartender blew away. The boat I lived on sank, etc.

So I decided to give the British Virgin Islands a try and learned many aspects about the boating industry from chartering, yacht sales, yacht management while polishing my sailing skills.

Upon my move to Fort Lauderdale, I picked up a job as a charter broker, booking boats in the British Virgin Islands. I was there for 25 years, working my way up. I ended up as the marketing director for a boating company that sold boats, and operated marinas and charters throughout the US and Caribbean.

COVID-19 certainly is a was a big wakeup call. As the boat business is a non-essential business, I found myself entering the

essential businesses like software to assist in providing a platform for virtual inspections — Inspected.com. It is essential.

As of now, many government agencies and cities have implemented Inspected.com as their software of choice for virtual inspections. Inspected.com is also currently being utilized by many different verticals besides government inspections such as the marine industry, education, boat and car insurance, and the telehealth industry.

Bootcamp Barry's' Brown: I am from Baltimore originally. I attended Syracuse. I always wanted to work with children, so my original educational pursuit was Early Childhood Education, with a minor in Retail Management. I worked in preschool in college as a side job and realized that I did not really need to go to college to do that. I felt like I was wasting my college time. Over the summer, I went to work with my dad, who owns a food service consultant company. He got me a job with an interior design firm. He never thought I would want to be a designer.

But I fell in love with it. That is what I wanted to do. So I went back to school and changed my major in my second semester to environmental design for interiors—half interior design, half architecture program. I kept my original major as my minor, and my original minor of retail management as my minor.

After graduation, I moved to New York City and landed a job at a residential contractor that did high-end cabinetry and custom kitchens for high-end apartments in the city and the Hamptons. I liked that a lot, but I wanted to be in fashion. I wanted to do commercial design.

I ended up working for H&M as a sales associate twice a week. I wanted to get into store design. Within a month of working there, I was called to corporate. I thought I was getting fired, but they ended up hiring me to their merchandising team. I did not even know what merchandising was, but they offered me the position. I took a leap of faith.

At the time, there was only four H&Ms in New York City. I got to manage the whole store, put out the new clothes, track the finances. I would put skirts on a mannequin. They let me bend the rules after I put a belt on one of the mannequins.

After doing that for about a year, I ended up at Ann Taylor, where I worked for three years. I am an interior designer by trade, but my boss was an architect. She was eyeing a job at Tiffany's, so she worked her butt off to teach me everything she knew before she left. One of the cool things I did at Ann Taylor was help start the Loft Outlet concept.

From there, I went to Kiehl's doing Shop and Shop design for a special project they had for Dillard's, L. Brands and La Senza.

When Guess made me an offer, I moved to California, before I ended up at Barry's. I became their first in-house designer. They wanted me to take my corporate experience and help them standardize. There was six of us at the time. For the first two years, it was me and just my Chief Development Officer. We built the design from the ground up, built a team and created standards.

And then COVID hit hard. I know I will land on my feet. It is a very interesting, transitional time for me. **CCR**