

Corey Schwartz and David Roberts cash in on Miami's student population

Who knew that the down-side of a depressed real estate market would be an excellent time for Corey Schwartz and David Roberts to launch College Town Living? CTL is a niche marketing operation that focuses on real estate services for the college community, especially renters at the University of Miami. Based at ReMax/Advance Realty in Coral Gables, the partners' long-range goal is to become independent brokers, assemble and manage rental properties of their own, and even start a moving company.

Schwartz and Roberts founded College Town Living in early 2007 with the idea of connecting landlords with renters who, if the business model holds true, will call CTL later to buy or sell. They picked a region-neutral name that would be viable wherever an affluent community surrounds a private college, because they hope to expand the concept beyond South Florida.

The key to CTL's success in Miami, according to Schwartz, is "positioning itself in a way that students and their parents, employees, professors, administrators, and local property owners know to come to us for their real estate needs." The website, collegetownliving.com, integrates MLS property information, plus content tailored for the college crowd. Coral Gables restaurant listings begin with pizza and Chinese, with a separate category for desserts. An entertainment option is paintball, and a list of car dealers appears under shopping.

Schwartz and Roberts, both UM alums, maintain contacts at their alma mater and capture referrals from campus services, the bookstore, and multiple departments. Roberts, a Miami native with experience in the mortgage and construction industries, is encouraged by the reception CTL has received.

"We've exceeded our expectations, generating over \$500,000 in rental volume [over the past year]," he reports.

"Impressing renters and landlords with our professionalism is a strategy for future growth," says New York-born Schwartz, who came to Miami as a freshman in 1995. "Our thinking is that if we assist hundreds of renters now, those clients will think of us after they become businessmen or lawyers or doctors."

Charlette Seidel, managing broker of Coldwell Banker's Coral Gables office, agrees that working with renters can build business. "It's a good way for associates to stay busy until the market turns," says



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Seidel, who has weathered cycles like this one before.

"We constantly have a new group of tenants coming into our market," says Schwartz, "so we are contacting property owners who may need our services." CTL sends fliers to owners within a ten-mile radius of UM, offering to help them decide whether to sell or lease in the current market.

What advice do they give would-be sellers?

"That depends on the equity an owner has in a home," says Schwartz. "If you've owned it for ten year or more, leasing is a good option because, chances are, your mortgage payment is low. If you bought in the last three to four years, you might not be able to make a profit, but the rental income might cover your expenses." He allows this is not the best time to sell, although CTL actively seeks listings.

Heidi Palmer, former director of marketing for the BankUnited Center, UM's on-campus arena, met Schwartz when he was with UM's athletic department, before going into real estate. She listed her Kendall condo with CTL and has since relocated to Charlotte, N.C. "Corey gave me insights into pricing and other guidance. I closed on the sale in June," says Palmer.

Landlords pay the real estate agents' fees, usually ten percent of the gross annual lease. Schwartz calculates that rentals in Coral Gables, Coconut Grove, South Miami, Pinecrest, and Kendall average \$600 to \$800 a month per student. One-bedroom apartments start at around \$1,000 a month, and houses with four or five bedrooms can rent for \$2,400 to \$4,000 a month.

"The owners meet the kids, and sometimes they talk directly with the parents, who often have to cosign the leases. It's an affluent group. Money's usually not the issue," says Schwartz.

Miami landlord Ronald Bell hired CTL last summer to find tenants for a five-bedroom house he owns near the campus. Beset by rising taxes and insurance, he planned to sell it as he had done with several other rentals.

"I'm 66," Bell volunteers. "I'm not looking to increase my property holdings. But if I'd known about Corey I might have kept some of those I sold off." Bell was impressed when CTL not only identified tenants quickly during the slow summer season, but facilitated transaction details and helped the coeds get settled.

"Corey went over there when a fuse blew and flipped the circuit breaker for them. It was definitely worth whatever I paid him." ■

COLLEGE TOWN LIVING