



BJ Santavy

LONDON PROPERTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

BJ Santavy was first introduced to the field of rental property management almost 20 years ago, and she has not looked back on the choices she made along the path of her chosen career. BJ has especially enjoyed learning to deal with a variety of people and their particular needs, and acquiring the requisite knowledge and experience to manage diverse situations. BJ's career path eventually led her to become president of the London Property Management Association (LPMA), which represents and protects the interests of landlords, property owners and associate members throughout the London area.

BJ was born and raised in Sarnia, where she lived with her parents and brother. Her father was an Olympic weightlifter and worked as a boilermaker (her brother followed in their father's footsteps in both endeavours), while her mother managed a local clothing store. After graduating from St. Patrick's High School in Sarnia, BJ went on to study physical education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. She had originally planned to enter teaching, as she loved inspiring others to learn.

BJ eventually married and moved to an apartment complex in London to be closer to her family of origin. BJ's husband, who had a construction background, took a position in the building doing renovations. One day, BJ went down to the office to pay their rent and saw an advertisement for a position as a rental agent and office assistant with Brentin Manor (the property manager for the complex). Little did she know that this random event would launch her career in property management.

"I didn't realize how difficult the work would be, but I grew to love the role," said BJ. "I worked as a rental agent for almost a year, and was able to eliminate the building's 30% vacancy rate. I was later promoted to property manager."

Building a career in property management

BJ worked as a property manager for her building's landlord for seven years. Then, in August 2001, CAPREIT (Canadian Apartment Properties Real Estate Investment Trust), one of the country's largest residential landlords, purchased a neighbouring rental property. The organization was looking to hire a new district manager for the London area, and BJ took the position, which meant greater responsibility in a larger organization.

"I went from managing 365 units for a small landlord to being responsible for more than 1000 rental units in a large firm," said BJ. "I believe that my background with a small company gave me an edge, since it required me to take on a lot of different duties. Joining a large organization like CAPREIT gave me an opportunity to learn more about how large companies work, while also expanding my knowledge and experience."

After working with CAPREIT for more than four years, BJ joined TransGlobe Property Management Services as a regional manager for London and the surrounding area. She stayed with that firm for two and a half years, and then went on to become director of residential operations for Skyline Management Inc., a multi-residential real estate firm, where she has worked since January 2009. Her current position involves overseeing the daily operations and business practices used at more than 8,500 residential units across Ontario.

BJ has been involved with the London Property Management Association (LPMA) since 2001. While she was working with CAPREIT, Brenda Trineer (an LPMA director and past president) approached her about joining the association. BJ became involved with several LPMA committees, and later joined the Board. She eventually became vice-president of LPMA. In May 2011, BJ was elected to the position of president, which is typically a two-year position.

"Although the president is an elected position, the vice-president usually becomes president in the next term," said BJ. "Serving as vice-president provides the person with the experience to fill the role of president when the time comes. LPMA has recently added a second vice-president position, which provides more opportunities for people to develop the experience required to become president in the future."

As president of LPMA, BJ is responsible for chairing monthly Board meetings, where members discuss the association's direction and issues of importance to landlords. They also review the progress of various committees on current projects. The president also chairs general meetings, seminars and other information sessions, which are open to all members to attend.

BJ is also Chair of the Canadian Federation of Apartment Associations (CFAA), which represents owners and managers of rental properties across Canada. BJ notes, "The vast bulk of the income taxes and capital gains taxes paid by rental owners are determined by the federal government. The federal government also strongly influences housing policy and CMHC lending rules, as well as setting energy policy. In my opinion, rental housing owners do not focus nearly enough attention on the federal government's issues that significantly affect their after-tax income."

BJ also participates in the Federation of Rental-Housing Providers of Ontario (FRPO). "At FRPO, I have chosen to sit on the Public Relations Committee. Arguably, the rental industry's biggest challenge is our public image. That is what leads to new rules clamping down on landlords. By working out how to address the underlying issue, the industry can improve its position with government and the public. I can then apply the approaches developed at FRPO at the municipal level (for LPMA) and at the federal level (for CFAA), as well as for the owners for whom I manage."

When her presidency concludes, BJ plans to continue significant involvement with LPMA, FRPO and CFAA. "Besides contributing to the associations, that involvement continues to help me grow as property manager. I plan to be involved in the property management industry for many years to come," said BJ. "The company I'm with, Skyline Management, is growing, and there are many exciting challenges ahead. I hope to learn from apartment associations in other cities and provinces, so that LPMA can apply their experience to our issues."

Learning how to motivate and manage people properly has had the greatest influence on BJ's personal and professional development. BJ takes great pride in fostering the success of the people around her, and has found that supporting individual performance has greatly contributed to corporate growth.

BJ works diligently to provide the people she manages with the tools to do their jobs and to manage their field staff most effectively. She has also learned to appreciate individuals' different skills and methods to achieve their goals. "I believe in never losing sight of individual needs and motivations, which is why I strive to accommodate different personalities in the workplace," said BJ. "This applies to tenants, colleagues and supervisors. I experience true satisfaction through the success of others, especially when they are recognized for their achievements."

London Property Management Association

LPMA was founded in 1967 by a group of London area landlords who wanted to create a forum where they could share information and

learn to operate their businesses more effectively. More than 45 years later, the original mandate remains, as LPMA continues to educate and inform landlords about managing rental properties in London and the surrounding area. The association currently consists of 568 members, including landlords, property owners, property managers, and associate members (suppliers to the property management industry).

“More than 60 percent of our membership owns or manages fewer than 30 units, with fewer than 2 percent owning more than 1,000 rental units, so the association tends to focus on issues of importance to smaller landlords,” said BJ. “Approximately 30 percent of our membership consists of suppliers, so we work diligently to include these members in our education and representation efforts.”

LPMA is a not-for-profit association that represents and protects the interests of large and small property owners in the London area. It serves as the voice of its members, and engages with government officials to ensure effective representation of the industry. This includes lobbying the municipal government on laws that affect local landlords and property managers.

LPMA continues to focus on providing education and information on property management and operating a rental property business. This includes offering courses and seminars to its membership, as well as a regular newsletter that details industry news and information. LPMA also employs a professional administrator, Brenda Davidson, who provides personal guidance to landlords on various property management issues.

Membership in LPMA provides a host of other benefits. The association maintains a library of forms and documents (such as leases and tenancy agreements) that help landlords to conduct their business. Members can also take advantage of supplier discounts (such as rent checks of applicants) which help them to reduce operating costs.

LPMA offers numerous networking opportunities, where members can share their knowledge with other landlords, meet suppliers, and discuss various business needs. Associate members sponsor many of LPMA's seminars, so members can benefit from educational opportunities and meet companies that can provide them with products and services to run their buildings more effectively.

“I also believe that LPMA's Board of Directors is a source of great benefit to the membership,” said BJ. “LPMA has grown and thrived over the years because of the Board's direction. It is a diverse group, with members who are small, mid-sized and large landlords, as well as associate members. We have a combination of new members with new ideas, as well as longstanding members and past presidents, who help to keep the Board focused and grounded.”

Industry challenges

Licensing of rental units has been one of LPMA's greatest issues with the City of London. LPMA took up the fight against licensing on behalf of its members. Although the current London bylaw affects primarily landlords with four or fewer units, LPMA's larger landlord members helped to fund

the legal battle against licensing. Although LPMA lost the fight against licensing, LPMA was able to keep the initial license fee to \$25 per property (plus other inspection fees), so that smaller landlords would not have to bear a high cost to license their units.

“We believe that licensing adds unnecessary red tape, since the property management industry in Ontario is already highly regulated,” said BJ. “We will continue to defend our members in this matter, since there is a move to increase the current licensing fee, and there may be demands to provide more documentation at a higher cost in the future.”

LPMA works with other associations to help improve the education and training of new and existing landlords. Property managers require knowledge and understanding of many different subjects and issues to properly run their buildings. LPMA has found that some problems related to property management revolve around a lack of knowledge or training. Raising the bar through professional standards and education will help to create a better environment for tenants and make it easier for landlords to provide a higher level of service. LPMA is also working to counter the misconception of the “big bad landlord,” which has spurred the drive for more regulation.

“While the rental housing industry is ultimately about business and the bottom line, most landlords take great pride in providing clean, safe and well maintained accommodations for their tenants,” said BJ. “Most landlords and property managers understand that this is a service industry and provide their tenants with excellent customer service. It's a big ship to turn, but we are using charitable events and other opportunities to continue our work to educate the public on the quality of our rental properties and landlords.”

Charitable interests

BJ and LPMA are committed to giving back to the community through various charitable endeavours. LPMA encourages its landlord members to collect food and donations from its residents every year as part of the Spring Hope Food Drive (which is currently in its ninth year). This past year, LPMA's members collected more than 28,000 pounds of food from tenants for London's Food Bank, and LPMA hopes to surpass that number in the spring.

LPMA also holds an annual charitable golf tournament every September, with proceeds being donated to different charities each year. Last year, LPMA donated \$18,000 to the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Over the years, LPMA has raised more than \$111,000 for various charities. This year's charity is My Sisters' Place, a London-based charity that provides housing and programs for women dealing with mental illness, addiction, street involvement, abuse, trauma, health, poverty and hunger.

“LPMA has provided me with many opportunities to give back and to be proud of the services that landlords provide,” said BJ. “Both my involvement in LPMA, and my employment with Skyline, have enabled me to participate in numerous community events. I've also been able to share my passion, pride and knowledge with others. My choice to pursue a career in property management has been far more rewarding than I ever expected.” **RHB**