



## city living

# Woman real estate pros laying foundation in field

BY ERASMO GUERRA  
Special to amNewYork

MacKenzie Landers got the real estate development bug while she was doing grunt work for a mason in her native Wyoming.

"You stock the block, build the scaffolding and mix the mud," she explained.

Now, Landers, 28, works as a project administrator at the city Department of Design and Construction and oversees a 35-acre, \$656 million police academy going up in College Point, Queens.

New York real estate has a mythic history that goes back to the first "deal" for Manhattan in 1626. But even these days, women remain under-represented, especially beyond the front line of gold-blazer sales ranks.

"It's still a male-dominated industry," admitted Susan Swanezy, 52, board president of WX, Inc., or Women Executives in Real Estate, which promotes the advancement of women in commercial real estate and mentors junior professionals and students.

**'It's still a male-dominated industry.'**

Susan Swanezy  
of WX, Inc.

"We want to make sure we foster relationships with them and offer them any guidance," said Jennifer Stewart, 40, managing director of global-asset-management real estate at J.P. Morgan and a WX board member who co-chaired a recent speed-mentoring event.

Landers, who attended, said: "If you can learn to build in New York, you can build anywhere."

amNewYork spoke with some of the city's top women in the real estate industry:



**Susan Swanezy**  
52, Hodes Weill & Associates

A partner at Hodes Weill & Assoc., a boutique advisory firm, Swanezy handles mergers and acquisitions, strategic advisory services, and restructuring real estate funds and portfolios.

A fan of Frank Lloyd Wright since the eighth grade, she loves commercial real estate. "You get the design component, the build, the financing," she said.

Hopeful about the energy she finds among the women coming up, she said: "I tell my sons, 'Be careful — it's the women you're going to have to compete with.'"



**Barbara Champoux**  
50, Crowell & Moring

A founding member and past president of the New York Commercial Real Estate Women's Network, Champoux said she knew as young as age 12 that she wanted to be a lawyer. "I don't know what caused me to make up my mind," she said. "But it wasn't as if we had a history of lawyers in the family."

Named one of the Top Women in Real Estate 2011 for her work in real estate law, Champoux is a partner at the New York offices of Crowell & Moring. Among her career highlights, she cites not the properties she helped to break ground, but the relationships she's forged over the years with other partners and clients.



**Debra Cole**  
51, Perkins + Will

As the director of business development at Perkins + Will, a firm that specializes in branded environments and urban design, Debra Cole said, "I go out and find business. I'm the hunter of projects."

Another of the Top Women in Real Estate 2011, Cole entered real estate a decade ago after 20 years of marketing experience in the casino industry.

Career highlights include serving as president for the Association of Real Estate Women. "I can't imagine being in this business in any other city," she said.



**Ruth Agnese**  
49, Appraisers & Planning, Inc.

A commercial real estate appraiser, Ruth Agnese said she's called in to value properties during a deal. In 2009, she was named Appraiser of the Year by the Associated Building Owners of Greater New York.

Agnese heads the firm where she first started in an administrative job and then, fascinated, took appraisal classes. "Between learning the process and getting designated — it's typically five years," she explained.

In her 25-year career, a highlight was helping to appraise the World Trade Center site just after 9/11. "It was extremely emotional and moving to be involved with such a project," she said.