

DISPATCH

Green With Envy

Nobody is selling the hottest real estate market in Boston harder than Carmela Laurella, which is why she's making just as many friends as enemies.

By **Monica Collins**

The Rose Kennedy Greenway exists today as piles of pay dirt being pushed around by bulldozers in the footprint of the demolished Central Artery. But real estate agents see gold in all that grime. The 1½-mile stretch of urban park parcels, scheduled for completion in 2007, bestows value to all properties along its path from the North End to Chinatown. Buyers are already anteing up for a piece of the new Boston dream.

"It's very, very attractive to people, because they want to be on the greenway. I just sold a very expensive home in Harbor Towers to people from out of town simply because they were attracted to the words 'Rose Kennedy Greenway,'" says Carmela Laurella, a broker who has made a bundle and a splash selling residential and commercial properties in the gleam of the greenway.

The diminutive Laurella — wearing Escada outfits and sensible shoes — has emerged as a queenpin in the rough-and-tumble world of downtown real estate sales. A former investment banker, she's had a broker's license only since 2002. Yet she boasts sales of \$45 million since entering the business. Laurella stakes her claim on neighborhoods once controlled by established agents with locks on the listings. She makes no secret of her ambition to sell \$35 million to \$50 million annually. During the summer, she says she averaged \$7 million in monthly sales, and currently

has \$19 million in listings.

Kevin Ahearn, a long-established Boston broker, recruited Laurella, 53, to head the waterfront office of Otis & Ahearn as the greenway grows. "The impact of the greenway is beyond what people can really understand yet," he says. "But there is going to be a huge open space, and open space is a residential feature. Along the waterfront, there's a tremendous amount of interest that's real, tangible, and dramatic."

During an interview, Laurella clicks into her ringing cellphone. A buyer confirms that he will go ahead with the \$1.5 million purchase of a penthouse at Burroughs Wharf. The condo had just come onto the market and been listed through another agency, but Laurella steered her client to the palatial aerie. She calmly goes over details with him and erupts in whoops of joy after she hangs up.

Her adversaries say she will do anything to seal a deal, a point Laurella does not exactly dispute. Her mantra? "Whatever it takes."

Laurella spends her own money to employ cleaners, plant primpers, and painters to plump up properties. When sellers at Constellation Wharf posted a sign advising potential buyers to take off their shoes before entering, Laurella went to work and persuaded the sellers to take down the sign. "I hired someone to clean the floors and vacuum the carpets because the 'shoes off' thing was killing me." She recently



closed on the \$1.2 million sale.

In New York and Los Angeles, cities with glitzier real estate, agents have become celebrities. Here, Laurella is a boldfaced name only in the classifieds. Her ads brim with lush language; Laurella writes the copy herself, with help from her husband, Vito Ascolillo. Ascolillo ticks off some of his wife's favorite words: "Gorgeous. Boutique. Prestigious. Affordable." "No," corrects Laurella. "I never use 'affordable.'" "Unit" is also verboten. "I use the word 'residence,'" she says. "'Unit' is so bland. Do you want to feel you're living in a unit?"

Reaction to Laurella from competing brokers is tart. They all ask for anonymity when talking about her. One agent con-

CARMELA LAURELLA, a relatively new player in Boston's real estate scene, says there are well-heeled home buyers who want a view of the coming Rose Kennedy Greenway.

cedes admiration for Laurella but wonders about the cost: "She works seven days a week, morning, noon, and night." Another, who describes the business as "catty, petty, and full of jealousy," predicts the "whirlwind around Carmela" will eventually consume her: "What ends up happening is you make a lot of mistakes. She'll burn out."

The white-hot pad peddler shrugs off the critics. "It's business," she says. **BG**

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