

Real Estate Journal

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DESIGNED BY BALDASSANO ARCHITECTURAL GRP. AND DEVELOPED BY PARR DEVELOPMENT CORP.

Zere Real Estate Services brokers 180,000 s/f Touro Law School totaling \$33 million

CENTRAL ISLIP, NY For Marie Zere the February 24 groundbreaking for a new home for Touro Law Center was a



Marie Zere



blessed relief. Zere, one of Long Island's leading woman commercial real estate brokers, had spent more than 12 years fraught with pitfalls arranging the deal.

Zere, president of Ronkonkoma, N.Y. based Zere Real Estate Services Inc., completed the deal last year, but the groundbreaking awaited permits from the town of Islip, which were issued only one week earlier.

The proposed 180,000 s/f, \$33 million law campus is to be constructed on 14.58 acres of vacant land adjacent to the Alfonse M. D'Amato U.S. Courthouse and Suffolk County's Cohalan Court Complex. Construction is expected to take 18 months.

The new campus, designed by the Ronkonkoma architectural firm, the Baldassano Architectural Group, is being built by Ron-konkoma based Parr Development Corp.

"The new Touro Law Center will be a national educational treasure," Zere said. "I am proud to say that I was instrumental in making this monumental deal of a lifetime happen. It will benefit all Long Islanders for generations to come."

The law school, the first of its kind nationally, because of its proximity to federal and state courts, will stress hands-on legal education, expanding learning from the classroom, and textbooks into real courtrooms. It will also be a cornerstone in an effort to revitalize Central Islip.

Zere's involvement in the project began after a December 18, 1992, speaking engagement, when she was asked by college officials to help them find a site for a campus. Because of her previous experience working with the Central Islip Economic Development Zone, she recommended a site in Central Islip owned by the New York Institute of Technology, which years earlier acquired property for its own campus on what had been part of the Central Islip Psychiatric Center.

"Touro's relocation to any portion of the former Central Islip Psychiatric Center was a natural," Zere said.

But there were complications along the way.

There were difficult negotiations over price with NYIT and problems in getting

state and federal approvals to use a former hospital building for private use. State law, she said, required that the building be razed once the bonds that had financed it were paid off.

One of the first things Zere did was to team with Ron Parr, who had constructed an industrial park and an affordable housing development on nearby land that also once had been part of the sprawling psychiatric hospital.

They soon decided that building from the ground up would be a better alternative and found the 15.48 acre parcel that was owned by the New York State Urban Development Corp.—the agency now called Empire State Development.

Initially, there was uncertainty if the 15 acres would be large enough to house the law campus, but Zere learned that because New York state owned the property, it could be developed to a higher density with unlimited height restrictions. Also, the state was asking \$80,000 an acre, more than Touro officials were willing to pay. A ground lease was considered, and the idea

was discarded by Touro, because of accreditation concerns. After a subsequent appraisal, the state agree to sell the land to Touro for \$10,000 an acre, but with a requirement it only be used for educational purposes. The sale required legislation to go through and it was only after a lobby effort by Parr and governor George Pataki, did a measure pass.

The move had been contingent on Touro's sale of its Huntington property to pay for the new campus. Several deals for the north shore site, all brokered by Zere, fell apart and eventually, the property was pulled from the market. Because of other property sales by the school, a fund-raising effort and the receipt of a \$500,000 federal grant, the deal no longer was contingent on the Huntington transaction.

There was more. The original architect for the project dropped out last year over a fee dispute. The Baldasso firm began working on the design only four months ago.

Zere credits Parr for the success of the effort. "Choosing Ron Parr as the developer for the new Touro Law Center was the most sound real estate decision I ever made," she said "We worked closely together and he advised me as to his progress on a daily basis. Our tenacity, creativity and fortitude as a team kept us going."

Zere said the project is the kind of thing she loves to do. "Developing from the ground up is what I live for," she said. "It's my forte."

Zere Real Estate Services has been dedicated to excellence for 25 years and offers a full range of corporate real estate services.