

BUSINESS PROFILE

New take on real estate rises from teardown trend

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STAFF WRITER

Brian Hickey doesn't see his move from securities trader to real estate broker as a big transition. He said he's doing the same thing he always did.

"It's just a different product," the lifelong Hinsdale resident said.

Hickey is owner and founder of Xchange Properties, a Clarendon Hills business that specializes in matching owners of redevelopment properties with buyers who want to build.

"Land is a commodity," he said. "What we're creating is a new marketplace to sell land."

Hickey founded Xchange Properties in August 2001. Xchange Properties' staff of five all are licensed brokers. Each has a separate territory, which includes the western and northern suburbs and Chicago.

"We didn't invent infill construction," said Hickey, referring to the term used by the building industry to describe the practice of tearing down old buildings to put new ones in their place. "It's what's going on all over the country. We're just a facilitator."

Infill construction is nothing

new, and it won't be gone anytime soon, Hickey said. His company sold 34 properties in 2002 and 69 in 2003, all of which were intended for redevelopment. Of the 85 Hinsdale properties that received demolition permits in 2003, 21 were sold by Hickey's company.

Xchange Properties differs from traditional real estate companies because of its ability to match buyers and sellers, Hickey said. Technology makes it possible to send information almost instantly to Xchange Properties' bank of 1,500 prospective buyers. Hickey said his method of selling creates a competitive atmosphere among buyers, ensuring sellers the highest price.

Technology also allows the information to be sent only to those who might be interested. A family looking for land in Hinsdale, for example, might not want information about a teardown available in Winnetka.

Another difference is cost. Sellers pay Xchange Properties a commission equal to 2 percent of the selling price.

Hickey paid full commission to his realtor when he sold his house to a builder several years ago.



Andrei Vorobiev and Brian Hickey outside a house at Sixth and Lincoln streets in Hinsdale. Hickey owns Xchange Properties, a Clarendon Hills business that specializes in matching owners of redevelopment properties with buyers who want to build. (Doings photo by Scott Hardesty)

"That's when the lightbulb went on," he said.

He realized that by selling directly to a builder, homeowners can avoid the costs and hassles of preparing a home for sale and showing it to potential buyers. Having grown up in one of Hinsdale's historic homes, Hickey isn't eager to knock

down sellable houses or those with historic significance.

"I'm sensitive to Hinsdale and its traditions," Hickey said.

He and his staff do extensive research to determine whether a property will bring a higher price as a teardown or as a traditional real estate sale.

"Today, we are a local compa-

ny," Hickey said.

But plans for the near future are to branch out to other metropolitan areas where infill construction is a growing phenomenon. In the next 12 to 18 months, Xchange Properties hopes to begin expanding to places like Florida, California, Washington, New York and Boston.

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