

Jet-setting IREM boss on mission to make management miles better

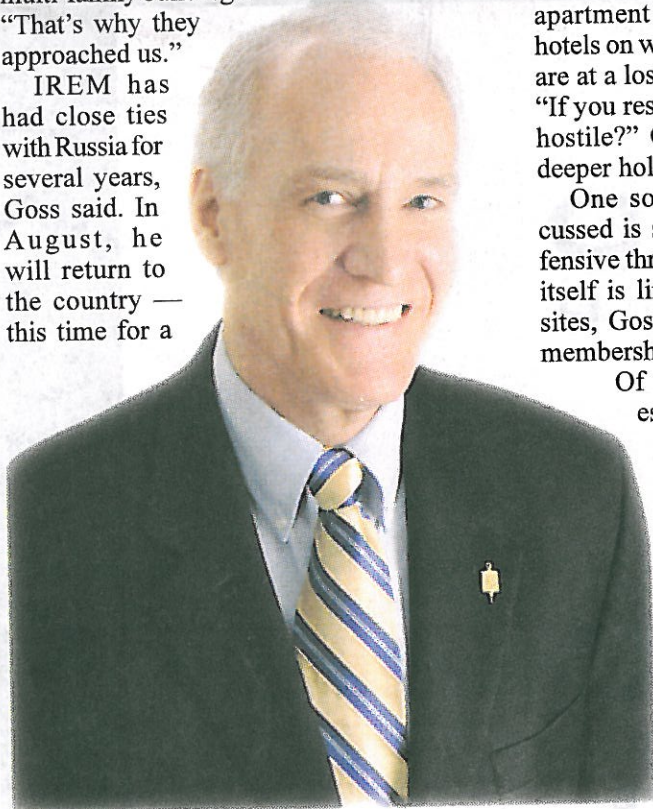
By LIANA GREY

Ron Goss barely had time to rest after returning from a trip to Moscow last Wednesday. The next day, the IREM president was on a plane to Orange County, California, where he met with members of a local chapter. "We deal with issues they want to talk about it, the problems they have," Goss said.

During his visit to Russia, Goss spoke with property managers struggling to maintain their portfolios following the global downturn. "They are pretty much where we were several years ago, in terms of assets, and what to do as far as taking care of assets," said Goss, who heads RPM Management, an Arkansas-based firm that oversees commercial, retail, and multi-family buildings.

"That's why they approached us."

IREM has had close ties with Russia for several years, Goss said. In August, he will return to the country — this time for a



RON GOSS: Jet-setting IREM president.

meeting in St. Petersburg — as part of a global tour with stops in India and Brazil.

Since Goss was appointed president in January, he has spent much of his time crisscrossing the continents. IREM has over 80 chapters, including ones in Korea, Japan, Canada, and Poland, and Goss hopes to visit a chunk of them before his term ends this winter. "Most of May, I was out of the office," he said. Over the next few weeks, he will touch base with groups in New York and Washington DC.

Across the board, he's discovered, property managers are concerned about digital technology, particularly the rise of online message boards.

With tenants flocking to the web to review apartment complexes, and travelers rating hotels on websites like TripAdvisor, managers are at a loss as to how to address complaints. "If you respond too quickly, does it seem too hostile?" Goss said. "You can either dig a deeper hole, or reverse a situation."

One solution IREM chapters have discussed is staying on the public relations offensive through Twitter and Facebook. IREM itself is linked in to the latest social media sites, Goss said, which has helped increase membership.

Of all career paths in commercial real estate, he joked, "property management has not been the sexiest." But when the recession hit, the sector was one of few in the industry still hiring. "Commercial brokers, looking for alternatives, are finding that property management is more stable," Goss said. To build a future workforce, chapters make presentations on college campuses and offer mentoring services, Goss said.

Aspiring property managers

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are encouraged to enroll in IREM's education program, which prepares members for accreditation. "We have classrooms, we also have online courses, we have home study," Goss said. "It all depends on what track you're on."

Goss himself earned a certificate of property management through IREM's course offerings.

After completing a master's in education at the University of Central Arkansas, the California native spent seven years teaching sociology and coaching basketball at a junior high school in Little Rock.

In 1977, newly married and struggling to live off a \$12,000 salary, Goss enrolled in IREM's education program. "I knew nothing about the business," he said. "The IREM course was my introduction to the industry."

After landing a job at RPM Management, he found a mentor in Bob Deel, one of the state's first certified property managers. "There have been two IREM presidents from Arkansas," Goss said. "We're from the same company. That shows how supportive Bob Deel is."

Three years after enrolling in his first

IREM class, Goss joined, and eventually ran, a local chapter, where he was awarded "CPM of the year" in 1986.

Some things haven't changed since then, like a focus on ethical property management. But today's hot topics, including bed bugs and sustainability, were hardly on the radar during Goss' early years at the organization. "We specifically revisit the curriculum every three years," he said.

"As the law changes, we have to make sure we're updated."

A green building management class, for instance, has worked its way into the course list. "Sustainability is a big focus that all our members have told us is an important part of what we provide," Goss said.

IREM hands out awards to environmentally conscious building managers, and held a conference in Houston several weeks ago that attracted over 400 real estate professionals from around the country.

With utilities responsible for 23% of operating costs, Goss said, energy efficient practices can raise bottom lines. It's a fact that European property managers know well. "They're a little ahead of us," said Goss. "We're trying to catch up."