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WCBR Moves to New Home in White Plains

By John Jordan

WHITE PLAINS – The Westchester County Board of Realtors moved its operations to expansive state-of-the-art space at the Westchester Pavilion shopping center on Aug. 1. The Board's headquarters and those of the Westchester-Putnam Multiple Listing Service are now housed in approximately 16,000 square feet of penthouse space at the 60 South Broadway property.

WCBR had called 59 South Broadway, directly across the street from its new corporate headquarters, for 26 years. WCBR and Westchester Pavilion owner Urstadt Biddle Properties Inc. of Greenwich, CT, officially announced the grand opening of the new offices later in the month. WCBR signed a long-term lease for the space, which was designed and renovated specifically for WCBR utilizing some existing space and new space built on the rooftop of the 190,000-square-foot Westchester Pavilion. WCBR joins Sports Authority, Toys 'R Us, Daffy's and Outback Steakhouse as major tenants at the retail complex.

P. Gilbert Mercurio, chief executive officer of the Westchester County Board of Realtors stated, "We are pleased to have been able to accomplish our goal of staying in White Plains in a larger, more efficient space with good parking and attractive office and classroom space for our employees and our members. Urstadt Biddle Properties exceeded our expectations in terms of delivery of space requirements and professionalism."

Willing Biddle, president of Urstadt Biddle Properties Inc. added, "We are thrilled to have landed the Board of Realtors in this challenging and competitive market. I believe we offered the best package in terms of location and timing. We anticipate that their active membership base will be a big boost to the shopping center. We also want to recognize the



William A. Kelly & Company who did the construction on time and on budget."

Hank Fries of Henry W. Fries Real Estate of White Plains acted as consultant to the Board of Realtors. James Aries and Wayne Wirth, senior vice presidents at Urstadt Biddle Properties, also worked on the deal. The new headquarters features larger more modern classroom space and conference space and attractive amenities for students and WCBR staff.

The deal originated from an idea broached by Mercurio to Urstadt Biddle about two-and-a-half years ago as the Board was beginning to explore its headquarters options with its lease at 59 South Broadway expiring at year's end 2007. The Board later negotiated a lease extension to the end of 2008 at the property while its space at 60 Broadway was being built out.

"It was really just a casual suggestion to the Urstadt Biddle people that 'Why don't we build something on their rooftop? And I don't know that it was all that serious a proposal, it was just a throwaway idea because we knew in a couple of years our lease at 59 South Broadway was going to run out..."

Afterwards, Urstadt Biddle executives expressed interest in the proposition and after some discussions and WCBR Board of Directors' approval to proceed, the project grew from there. Mercurio credited Hank Fries for his efforts on the venture as well as architect James Smith of Esposito Design Associates of Stamford and con-

tractor **William A. Kelly & Company** for their work in designing and building out the space. Mercurio said that while the Board considered other available space in White Plains, the Board was focused on the Pavilion project.

Mercurio said that the key attributes to the new space are: a central location near its former headquarters and mass transit; a very high visibility at South Broadway and Post Road; ample decked parking and an efficient office layout for the Board, MLS and School of Real Estate to operate because the space was built to the Board's needs.

After relocating to the new offices, Mercurio said of the new space, "It has exceeded our expectations... Everyone who has visited our offices thus far has indicated that they think it is just a wonderful environment and they feel pleased that their organization is projecting this high quality, attractive image to its members and the public."

The Board, founded in 1916, has undergone tremendous growth in recent times. Mercurio, who joined WCBR in 1980, recalls the WCBR had operated out of about 1,000 square feet of space at 188 East Post Road, while the MLS ran out of approximately 1,200 square feet at the Northcourt Building at 175 Main St., both in White Plains. In 1982, the Board and MLS consolidated their operations at 59 South Broadway into about 6,000 square feet. In the late 1980s when Colwell Banker closed an office adjoining WCBR, the Board expanded into that space and doubled its size to about 12,000 square feet. That space consisted of about 6,000 square feet on the main level and about 6,000 square feet of basement space. In the mid 1990s the Board's membership stood at about 3,500. Today WCBR has a membership that exceeds 7,500 Realtors.

WCBR and Urstadt Biddle Properties will be co-hosting an Open House showcasing the Board's new headquarters on Sept. 23 from 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. The event will be held on the main floor with tour groups going up to the new offices.