

STRATEGIES FOR SMALL BUSINESS

THE BUSINESS REVIEW

albany.bizjournals.com

JUNE 1-7, 2007 25



Lawyer designs Latham office to make real estate transactions more efficient and less stressful

BY MICHAEL DeMASI
THE BUSINESS REVIEW

It has been almost 10 years since Paul Sciocchetti decided to devote his law practice exclusively to residential and commercial property transactions.

But only in the past two years has he been able to hone the system down to a science.

Sciocchetti certainly isn't the first attorney to focus his practice on real estate closings, but he may be the only one who offers fresh-baked treats every day.

Chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin cookies sit on a plate at the receptionist's desk.

The cookies are among the creature comforts Sciocchetti, 46, believes alleviate the stress that often accompanies signing paperwork to take ownership of property.

He sees the soft-glove approach as a way to set himself apart from other

attorneys gunning for the same piece of the real estate closing market.

His goal is to make the experience as efficient and pleasing as possible for real estate agents because they often refer clients to an attorney.

Last year his firm handled about 3,000 closings. In a typical deal, the firm represents the borrower and the lender.

"The volume of my business has gone up every year," Sciocchetti said.

The market has slowed this year, but Sciocchetti said it has picked up within the past month and he expects to do as many closings this year as in 2006.

By focusing on closings, Sciocchetti said he doesn't have to concern himself with tying up a room that would

otherwise be used for a deposition. He doesn't have to juggle spending time in court with being available for clients in the office.

And, since it's a high-volume business, he can do well charging \$395 for most closings (it was \$550 before the region's residential real estate market began slowing down in late 2005).

He also doesn't have to worry about this scenario: a

SEE OFFICE, PAGE 26

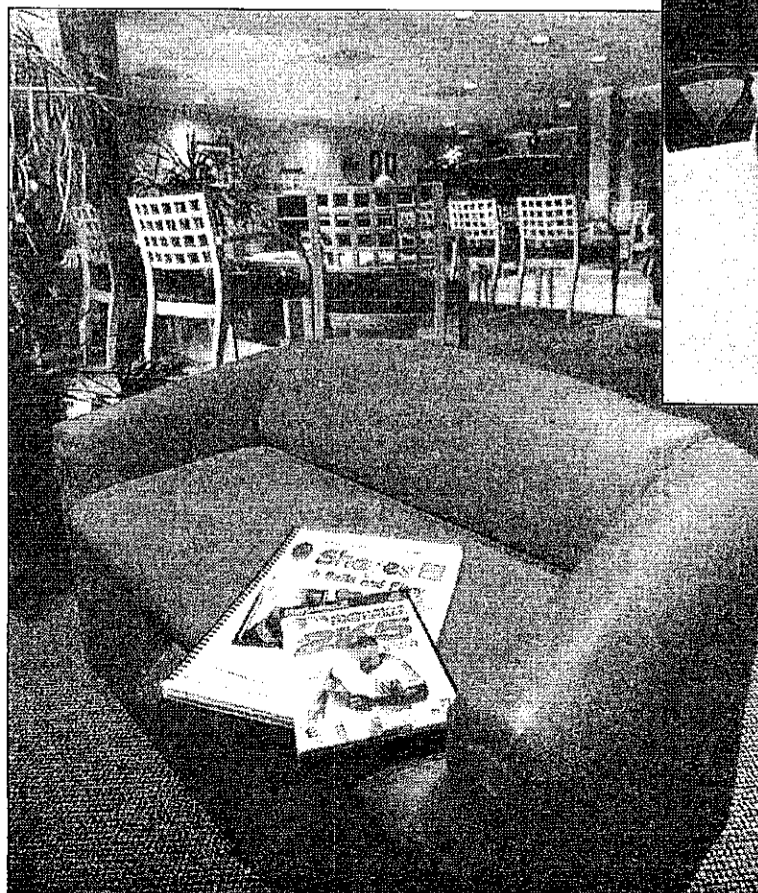
QUICK INFO

Sciocchetti & Associates PLLC

12 Century Hill Drive
Latham 12110
867-3001

Paul Sciocchetti

- Graduated from Pace University School of Law, 1986
- Admitted to the bar, 1987
- Opened firm in Latham in April 2005



DONNA ABBOTT VLAHOS | THE BUSINESS REVIEW

(Above) Mary Joyce, the administrator at Sciocchetti & Associates, offers visitors fresh-baked chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin cookies.

(Left) The children's play area in lobby has coloring books, PlayStation 2 and movies on DVD.

OFFICE: There is an espresso machine and flat-screen TVs tuned to home improvement channels

FROM PAGE 25

married couple on the verge of divorce sniping at each other in the lobby while another couple—happy but anxious about the home they're buying—sits nearby. Or the presence of a criminal defendant in the office making someone else feel nervous.

He credits another attorney in the area, Tony Ianniello, for giving him the inspiration to focus on closings.

Ianniello "invented this game," he said. "We're trying to take it to the next level."

Sciocchetti is one of four attorneys at his firm. There are also a dozen support staff, most of whom are paralegals who keep track of the stacks of paper that accompany each closing, not to mention dates and deadlines.

"You can't do closings like you used to where attorneys handled every part of the process," Sciocchetti said.

Other features of his comfortably appointed office at 12 Century Hill Drive in Latham are an espresso maker, flat-screen TVs tuned to home improvement channels, decorating magazines and a small area for kids with coloring books, PlayStation 2 and movies on DVD.

There's also a separate room equipped with a computer, fax, copier and other tools for real estate agents, in case they want to get other work done if there's a delay during a closing.

Sciocchetti opened the office in April 2005, two years after splitting with his previous partners in Schenectady, Gerard Parisi and Patrick Saccocio (Sciocchetti said he had to remain in the Schenectady office after the split because of his lease).

He worked closely with his office man-

ager, Jill Arnold, to design the space. The results are impressive.

Sandra Nardoci, an agent at **Prudential Manor Homes** in Latham who has worked in local real estate for 16 years, said, "No one's office looks like Paul's."

She added, "I would think it would set him apart from other attorney offices. I don't know if it will make the difference but certainly he sets himself apart by doing that. When people say to you what makes you different from everybody else, he can say, 'I make my clients feel at home.' It's a warm, welcoming office."

Nardoci and another broker, Maurice Andreozzi of **Countrywide Home Loans**, said they always give clients at least three attorneys as a reference. Convenience is a big factor when picking an attorney, so being in Latham is an advantage to Sciocchetti.

"The location is huge," said Andreozzi, branch manager. "That, in and of itself, is the big thing. ... The amenities are beautiful. That's sort of the icing on the cake. It really comes down to service."

Sciocchetti said the number of closings he handles doubled after moving from Schenectady to Latham, a jump he attributes to the central location. Still, he knows convenience, cookies and flat-screen TVs in the lobby won't matter to a real estate agent if a crucial piece of paper is missing during a closing.

"They want the transaction to close because they don't get paid if it doesn't," he said. "They can't afford to have the deals fall apart."

LESSONS LEARNED

What was your best business decision?

Going out on my own as an attorney and, more recently, moving my office to Latham.

What was your worst business decision?

"I really don't know if I made too many. We usually find a silver lining in every black cloud. ... We've had some decisions that maybe weren't the best, but we made the best of them."

What was the biggest risk you took?

Opening a solo practice less than two years out of Pace University School of Law in 1986.

What was a turning point in the business?

Around 1999 I started doing almost exclusive transactional work in residential and commercial real estate.

What tip would you give to someone starting out in business?

"You have to be prepared to outwork any of your competition. ... It's not so much being better as being better prepared. You have to always be willing to put the time, energy and effort in."

What is your guiding principle?

"I've always had a real strong sense of determination. When I set my mind to something—I'm not saying I continue to keep going after I've learned that I should modify and change—but when I set my mind to something, I stay pretty focused and set out to accomplish what I have to accomplish."

