



Executive Vice President Ashley Kuhn ... Helping to guide organization to growth in projects.

Kuhn drives White Lotus Group by leveraging potential in projects

Editor's Note: This is one of a series of profiles featuring Midlands Business Journal 40 Under 40 award winners — entrepreneurs, business owners, managers and professional men and women under 40 years of age. The 2017 awards were co-sponsored by Northwest Bank and the University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Business Administration.

by Dwain Hebda

Ashley Kuhn's leadership ethos has brought White Lotus Group strong growth across virtually all market sectors, leadership she boils down to some very simple components.

"My leadership style is, No. 1, transparent. I believe in transparency," she said. "I believe in everybody being able to see every moving part. Second, I lead by example; I'll do anything from scrubbing a toilet before a grand opening all the way up to developing budgets and leading the development team."

As executive vice president, Kuhn is responsible for business development as well as the company's financials and financial planning and all human resources functions. Whether growing a book of business or fostering growth among individual employees, the fundamentals are always the same.

"I work hard. I work tireless hours. I think it motivates people to see their leader working just as hard as them," she said. "My philosophy is, if I'm going to roll up my sleeves and get my hands dirty then my expectation is that those around me will do the same."

Kuhn's tenacity and business skills have raised the performance of everyone around her, resulting in impressive growth. Under her guidance, White Lotus Group increased in the property management sector by \$19 million, in self-storage facilities by \$13.5 million and in the hospitality sector by \$7 million over 2004 levels.

But it's been the real estate development and construction arena where Kuhn's accomplishments truly stand out. She's grown that book of business \$231 million over 2004 lev-

els, thanks in part to a keen eye for opportunity.

"In a nutshell, we take pride in doing the projects nobody else wants to do," she said. "Our traction comes from taking on projects that people either said can't be done or projects that the city was saying needed to be demolished rather than having anything done with it."

"It took a lot more brain damage, as you might say, but at the end it had a lot more reward to it. Where we gained our traction was playing in the areas that nobody else wanted to play in."

One project that exemplifies this attitude is the East Plaza at 52nd Street and Ames Avenue. The building had been vacant for 25 years and had neither a roof nor floors when White Lotus Group bought it. Today, it is 100 percent occupied and home to Heartland Workforce Development among other tenants.

"It's overwhelming for White Lotus Group to be gaining the traction that we've gained over the last 15 years," she said. "It's overwhelming to be part of something from the ground up and see it become a brand that's recognizable, a brand that people depend on and a brand that now people are saying 'Oh, do you see that sign there? It's going to be something good.' It's definitely an overwhelming feeling to finally be in that seat."

Kuhn said while the commercial real estate boom is an obvious focus, White Lotus Group is also intensifying its efforts in the industrial space while hedging current business against the inevitable market downturn.

"We own 10 self-storage facilities in and around the Midwest; our goal is to build five within the next year and we're really focused on growing that part of our company," she said. "Not just on self-storage but all industrial in general."

"Obviously, we recognize that we're soaring high right now and for every time we're soaring high there's usually a low spot behind it. So, we use these years to kind of prepare for a market downfall to where if the market does take a turn, we're prepared and we're comfortable with where we stand."

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