

DECEMBER 07, 2017

The Super Who Became a Property Manager

By Bill Morris

➤ **MAYBE RUNNING BUILDINGS** runs in Brian Scally's genes. He was born in the Inwood section of upper Manhattan in 1964, and when the family moved to the Hudson River town of Irvington in Westchester County, his father became the super in their 72-unit garden-style apartment complex. Young Brian was always watching and learning.

"I've always been a handy guy, helping my dad around the building, always watching how plumbers and painters did things," says Scally, 53, the salt now dominating the pepper in his close-cropped hair. He also absorbed his father's work ethic: "Do it once and do it right."

Scally was good enough at soccer to win a tryout with the professional New York Cosmos, and as he was working toward an education degree at Concordia College in Bronxville, he was named a first team All-American. But the soccer pitch was not to be his path.

Shortly after graduation, a super's job opened up at a garden complex not far from where he'd grown up. He jumped at the opportunity. Marriage to a college girlfriend, Marguerite Dowd, soon followed, then, at clockwork two-year intervals, the births of two sons and a daughter. Time began to gallop. "We were living in a great river town with good schools, so we decided to stay," Scally says. "Twenty years go by."

In those years, Scally became a shop steward with the Service Employees International Union's local 32BJ, helping negotiate union contracts. He saw his role as two-fold: "To fight for the union



contract, and to assist with issues between supers and boards and management."

Meanwhile, Scally became an expert on all facets of a building: plumbing, painting, wiring, sheetrock, boilers, roofs, masonry, gas lines. Gregarious by nature – maybe it's an Irish thing – he also learned how to deal with contractors, Con Ed, building inspectors, shareholders, boards. "My property manager loved me," Scally says with his booming laugh.

About a dozen years ago, with his three kids nearing college age, Scally started thinking it might be time for a change. Property management seemed like a natural fit, and when he approached the company that managed his property, Scarsdale-based Garthchester Realty, they told him one of their managers had just given notice. Timing is everything. Scally got the job.

"Being a super was a good inroad for me," he says. "I don't ask anyone to do anything I haven't done, and that makes it easier to get the staff to buy in. There are not that many property managers who used to be supers. I have a unique ability

to handle the financial side as well as the physical side of a building."

He still helps negotiate union contracts, but for the past decade he's been sitting on the management/board side of the table. The goal, surprisingly, is much the same. "It's not knock-down, drag-out fight," Scally says. "Hopefully, we come up with a contract that boards and the union can live with. We haven't had a strike in many years, so I guess that's a good sign."

There are few people more qualified to interview building staff than Brian Scally. "When I interview potential supers," he says, "there one question I always ask: 'What's the first thing you do when the boiler's on safety, and shut down?' A lot of the young people look at the computer, and that's it. I want someone to look at the computer, then restart the boiler and listen. I want him to tell me that if he hears the flame getting blown out, he knows the damper's stuck open. I want a guy who's willing to learn both ways."

What's the most valuable asset for property managers? "Probably personality," Scally replies. "I take the time to talk to shareholders, see how they're doing. Taking the time for that conversation is key. So is responding and communicating. If you don't respond, even to a general question, people get frustrated. Follow up is one of Garthchester's mantras."

Scally has come a long way from his boyhood days of watching the plumbers and painters at work in his building in Irvington. He's now vice president and co-owner of both Garthchester Realty and Hudson North Management, but you get the impression there's something more important to the man than the titles on his business cards. "I can actually say I love my job," Scally says. "Something new happens almost every day. I really get joy out of talking to boards and seeing a building grow with us. And when I see a guy go from porter to handyman to super, there's nothing better. I know that person is striving." ■