

CHANGING DIRECTIONS: Jim Spatz

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Was: Emergency room doctor What is he doing now? Real estate developer



Real estate developer Jim Spatz. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

Jim Spatz is known as one of Nova Scotia's leading real estate developers, but his first career was as a doctor.

Spatz grew up around the family business started by his father, Simon. The elder Spatz owned a grocery store and then branched out into real estate via what was then Southwest Apartments.

But his son knew from a young age that he wanted to study medicine. And Jim Spatz's parents, immigrants from war-torn Europe, encouraged him to pursue that goal.

"There was never any expectation that I would have to come back to the family business," says the chairman and CEO of what's now **Southwest Properties**.

After graduating from Dalhousie University's medical school in 1974, Spatz was a general practitioner in Dartmouth for five years. He then moved to Montreal for residency training in emergency medicine.

Spatz worked in the emergency room for almost 10 years before returning to Halifax and joining the family business in 1988.

The developer enjoyed the years he spent as a physician but says it was always in the back of his mind that he might like to get into the property business.

But making the transition at about age 40 was an eye-opener. Spatz says it took a couple of years to get comfortable in his new role, especially since a recession hit soon after he joined the company.

“I went from doing something that I was pretty good at to something where my significant qualification was that I was the boss’s son.”

But the upside included working with his father, who was in his mid-70s when his son came on board. Jim Spatz says he learned a lot from his dad, who continued coming into the office every day until he was in his 80s.

The doctor-turned-developer gradually took over running the business, expanding its portfolio and geographic reach.

While his two careers are vastly different, Spatz says some of his medical skills translate well into property development.

“There’s no question that I brought some of those skill sets in terms of gathering the facts and trying to make a good decision, trying to exercise good judgment.”

Source: Chronicle Herald <http://thechronicleherald.ca/business/1187259-changing-directions-jim-spatz>