

People on the *Inside*

Midtown's location, amenities help market mixed-use community

Photos by Chris DeStefano
The Palm Beach Post

Uri Vaknin of The Marketing Directors says of The Residences at Midtown, 'We have been working on projects all over the Southeast, and this property is our shining star.'



By CHRIS DeSTEFANO
Real Estate Weekend Writer

Uri Vaknin's love of the arts — and the extreme — has taken him all over the world. It also has put him on a new career path that he never had imagined.

Vaknin is the vice president of business development and sales for The Marketing Directors, which handles the sales and marketing for The Residences at Midtown in Palm Beach Gardens.

Before getting involved with real estate and joining The Marketing Directors, Vaknin owned an Atlanta art gallery that was featured in several national magazines.

"I look at selling real estate as a piece of artwork," Vaknin said. "And when you have a great development like Midtown, you can sell it as a piece of art."

Midtown, on PGA Boulevard between Interstate 95 and Florida's Turnpike, just west of Military Trail, is a mixed-use community that features one- to three-bedroom residences that all are within walking distance to shops, restaurants, a 500-seat cultural center and a 300-seat banquet hall.

Developed by RAM and completed in early 2008, Midtown offers 225 lofts and condominiums in three four-story Mediterranean-style buildings and a two-story building above the retail shops of Main Street.

Vaknin also has put his artistic touches on the property. Black-and-white photographs hang in the crème-colored hallways of the four-story buildings, while the community hosts cultural events such as "Art in the Gardens" with 100 regional artists set for Nov. 22-23.

There also is a landscaped Zen garden, the perfect spot to contemplate which nearby restaurant — including Pizza Fusion, Saito's Japanese Steakhouse, Field of Greens, Cantina Laredo, III Forks, J. Alexander's and Marble Slab Creamery — to walk to for dinner.

"To me, it's so much more enjoyable to sell something when you have all those wonderful components and cultural programming," he said. "People are looking for that."

Just east of the community is Garden Square, with even more restaurants, shops and a Publix within walking distance.

"What residents love about Midtown is the location," Vaknin said. "You are right off I-95 and near the turnpike, you are a few miles from the beach, and The Gardens mall is right on the other side of the highway. And, of course, real estate is all about location, location, location."

Vaknin, 39, said The Marketing Directors has been working with Midtown since last spring. The community, which is 40 percent sold and offers immediate occupancy, features one- to three-bedroom units priced from the \$150,000s to the low \$400,000s.

"We have had consistent sales here," Vaknin said. "We have been working on projects all over



Residents of Midtown can relax at the clubhouse, resort-style pool and spa.

the Southeast, and this property is our shining star. I think it's partially because people love the property, but our pricing is very realistic."

Vaknin, whose father is Moroccan and his mother German, speaks fluent German and has lived in Europe. But he was raised in Atlanta and now spends two days a week at Midtown and two days a week in Chapel Hill, N.C., at another property The Marketing Directors is overseeing.

He has worked for the company for two years, since it started its Southeast Division.

He was content with his art gallery until a real estate opportunity came knocking in 2001.

"David Tufts, president of The Marketing Directors, was a client of mine. I mentioned to him that I had my real estate license, and he said to stop by his office Monday morning. I thought that he wanted to talk to me about buying more artwork. It turns out he wanted to talk to me about selling condos.

"I said, 'You know what? Let me try it out and see if I like it.' Well, it took off, and I wound up being the company's No. 1 sales agent for three years in a row."

Vaknin said that, in 2006, he completed 249 deals, selling \$86 million in real estate to make him the No. 2 sales agent in Atlanta.

But it's not all work for Vaknin. He has traveled the world — including riding a camel through Jordan and Israel, spending a month in Africa, climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, and camping in the Serengeti (where he couldn't leave his tent at night because giant hippopotamuses were nearby).

He also went skydiving out of a plane at 20,000 feet to celebrate a birthday.

"I work very hard, but I play hard too," Vaknin explained.

He also admits an "indulgence" — an affinity for driving fast cars. He owns a Porsche Boxster.

"Real estate sales, especially in a challenging market, can be exhausting to a certain degree, so you try to balance that by doing something in your personal life. But coming down here to Florida for a few days a week is like a breath of fresh air."

Vaknin is doing his best to convince Midtown buyers they can experience the same feeling.



The Residences at Midtown is a mixed-use community featuring shops, a 500-seat cultural center, 300-seat banquet hall and several restaurants.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Developed by RAM, The Residences at Midtown offers 12 one- to three-bedroom floor plans in a mixed-use community in Palm Beach Gardens.

Prices: From the \$150,000s to the low \$400,000s

Community amenities: A clubhouse with resort-style pool and spa; business and fitness centers; and kitchen, bar and media lounge; a Zen garden; tennis court; and the shops, restaurants and cultural activities within Midtown

Special features: Granite kitchen countertops, stainless-steel appliances, track lighting, impact-resistant windows, crown molding and private balconies

Directions: Take Interstate 95 to PGA Boulevard and exit west. Cross Military Trail. Proceed to the community on the right at 4655 PGA Blvd.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday

For information: Call (561) 630-5757.

Web site: www.midtownpga.com