"HELLO DOLLY!"

Presenting Dolly Lenz
America's #1 Producer with $8 Billion in Sales

Who is Dolly Lenz?
As Vice Chairman of Douglas Elliman in New York City, she has moved more than $8 billion in real estate. That's more than double the next top agent in the country.

Lenz sold $750 million worth of property in 2007 and raked in $10 million in commission. By contrast, real estate agents' median sales volume that year was $1.6 million. And the income for an agent with comparable experience was $69,500, according to the National Association of Realtors.

Catering to wealthy entertainers and entrepreneurs, Lenz is a top power in New York real estate, along with Donald Trump. She aims to improve each day. That course kept her steady as she faced rejection from well over a dozen firms when she first sought a real estate job 25 years ago.

Idaliz Dolly Comino was born in the Bronx to Spanish immigrants. She started working at age 12, making sandwiches at a deli in her Washington Heights neighborhood. She worked several part-time jobs as a teenager and rode an hour to public school.

While attending Baruch College, where she majored in accounting, Dolly worked full time as a floor manager at Macy's. In 1979, she took her degree to United Artists and hit the sweet spot. As an auditor at the movie firm, she developed relationships with Barbra Streisand and other stars.

Lenz kept learning. She went back to school and earned a master's degree in auditing at New York's New School in 1983. And she kept building her income. Although she had a lucrative career at UA, she bought and rented out apartments for extra money.

She sure had the know-how. Since age 9, she had gone with her father to every house he looked at for investments in the Bronx. As a dredging engineer with a mechanical background, he taught her about boilers and other technical details.

When she was 18, her father helped her buy her first studio apartment, which faced a brick wall on Park Avenue in Murray Hill, for $63,000. As squeezed-in work outside of UA, she bought seven other units in the building and got herself elected treasurer of the board.

Lenz was so good at closing deals that her husband, Aaron, suggested she become a real estate agent. But she couldn't find a job in the industry. "I was basically told, 'You don't cut it. Why would you even apply?' and other things that would be considered illegal these days," she said.

Lenz heard the rejections, 20+ in all, and shrugged them off. "I must have had really thick skin or was very stupid," she said.

Bottom line, she was smart enough to embrace her motto: Next!

She realized it wasn't her lack of experience, but her looks that turned off prospective employers. She was seriously overweight, pulled her hair back in a scrunchie, had thick glasses and didn't wear makeup. Still, that wasn't enough to keep her out forever. Soon enough she landed her first real estate job at New York-based J. Rodman Realty, which has since gone out of business, and finally left UA.

One day a broker went out of town and asked her to show apartments to a client. She sold her in one day. Then she sold 18 more in six months.

Her experience following her dad made her a natural at selling. Plus she applied herself. She read reams of material and grasped the facts: the house's square feet, how long it was on the market. "I knew that market cold," she said.

In her first year, Lenz tripled what she earned as an auditor. Soon she was the top producer. She was later recruited by Sotheby's International Realty where she specialized in luxury condominiums and townhouse sales. She reigned as its top broker for a dozen years. By 1999, Douglas Elliman offered her a deal she couldn't refuse and she then proceeded to be a key player in the company's sale to Prudential in 2001.

She was looking and feeling good physically, having lost almost 80 pounds, and financially, as the owner of many properties.

If any Realtor knows New York, It's Lenz. She and her husband used to move from one apartment to the next every nine months to get a grip on areas. "I wanted to speak with authority to a neighborhood or a lifestyle in a building," she said.

Now they've been in the same abode for over three years.

Lenz never lets up. She works seven days a week, with little sleep. She hasn't taken a vacation in two decades. She answers hundreds of e-mails a day and carries around three BlackBerrys, though she owns 12. And talk about sweat: she jogs every day in Central Park.

Lenz somehow found time to volunteer at various charities including Ronald McDonald House, which provides housing for families of cancer patients. She also serves on the board of Police Athletic League of NYC and counsels cancer patients when called upon. "I just believe in trying to help in any way I can in adding value to somebody else's life," she said.

Lenz attributes her success to long-term relationships. She figures that 90% of her business comes from referrals or repeat clients. They include many foreigners, thanks to her working knowledge of French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish – her first language.

Lenz goes the distance. She once flew to Hong Kong and back to New York within 48 hours to close a deal with a Chinese client. She did the same for a deal in Moscow.

She hires limos and charters helicopters to take prospective buyers to see multimillion-dollar estates in the Hamptons.

"She's very, very hands-on, even though she's pretty high up," Sue Firestone, a Lenz friend and founder of interior designer SFA in Santa Barbara, Calif., told IBD. "Her success hasn't made her unreachable. She makes herself completely available, and her clients really like that about her."