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Roy Stillman, a Major Equity Investor in Trump International Hotel & Tower Fort Lauderdale, Admires Donald Trump's Marketing Genius

By Douglas Hanks III, The Miami Herald
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Feb. 25, 2005 - Roy Stillman brought most of the money to build Fort Lauderdale's latest luxury hotel, and he's sure to get little attention for it. So it goes when your junior partner is named Donald Trump.

"It's a little frustrating. But I knew that going in," said Stillman, the New York high-rise developer behind the Trump International Hotel & Tower Fort Lauderdale, set to start construction in the coming months. "I'll just have to suck up my ego."

He has plenty of humble company: Trump has already licensed his name to a Sunny Isles Beach condo-hotel, and plans to announce a second project on Fort Lauderdale beach. Meanwhile, Trump has launched more than a dozen high-rise towers around the globe, often with developers who see his name as a lucrative investment.

But along with Trump's marketability, his partners must deal with a novel array of perks and complications that real estate's biggest celebrity brings to the table.

First, there's The Apprentice television show. Though the ratings are off from last season, the weekly installments of would-be executives competing for Trump's favor remains a hit for NBC and a marketing bonanza for Trump.

Trump said he might offer the show's winner an apprenticeship at the Fort Lauderdale venture, like he did in past seasons for condo-hotels in Chicago and Las Vegas. But Stillman didn't sound eager to link the project with the game show.

"To me, there's a very loose connection [between what] these Apprentice candidates are asked to accomplish and business skills," said Stillman, who said he's learned a little about the show from its commercials. "This isn't a job for people who are

learning. This is a job, really, for experts."

Though Trump and his partner Bayrock Group brought Stillman into the Fort Lauderdale project less than a year ago, Stillman said he lined up the financing and put up the dollars to move ahead with the venture at the site of old Merrimac and Gold Coast hotels on Fort Lauderdale Beach Boulevard.

The 42-year-old emphasized his admiration for Trump's marketing genius and real estate acumen, calling him a "terrific partner."

But along with checking his own ego at the door, Stillman also must tread lightly when it comes to The Donald's. After a reporter told Trump that Stillman doesn't watch The Apprentice, Trump retorted he'd fire someone for saying such a thing.

"Besides," Trump said, "he's probably the only one in the country who hasn't watched it."

Even so, Stillman clearly has faith in Trump's allure.

The hotel's 298 condo-hotel units will sell for about \$1,000 a square foot -- sky-high for Fort Lauderdale and about \$300 more than what units went for next door at Fort Lauderdale's new luxury condo-hotel, the Atlantic.

"The Trump name has become a cultural emblem of success," Stillman said. "They feel they're buying into just a little bit of the glamour."

Stillman said only a few people have raised concerns about how potential buyers would react to Trump's casino company filing for bankruptcy last fall. "I just see excitement and green lights," when it comes to Trump's name, he said.

A New York real estate brokerage once estimated Trump's name adds about 18 percent to prices a condominium tower can charge, and Mark Ellert, who helped develop the Atlantic, thought Trump could probably tack at least a \$200-a-foot premium in Fort Lauderdale.

But some question the depth of Trump mania as the television star leverages his fame across an array of branded products: business suits, a business school, bottled water, golf clubs, cologne, a board game, a radio show, a magazine.

Overexposure is a worry in Fort Lauderdale too, since Trump, Bayrock and an undisclosed partner are getting ready to announce

the 12-story Trump International Beach Club about a mile down the beach from the 24-story hotel they're building with Stillman.

But Stillman contends normal brand-saturation principles don't apply to Trump. "I realized in Manhattan there are a number of Trump properties [Trump's website lists nine] and people seem to be able to reconcile that just fine."

He and Trump declined to describe the financial details of the partnership, though Stillman insisted Trump was an equity investor who put cash into the venture.

That wasn't the case in Sunny Isles Beach, where the owners of a Sonesta hotel reportedly signed a licensing deal worth \$4 million to add Trump's name to the oceanfront condo-hotel complex. The 2001 deal also yields Trump \$2.25 for every occupied room, according to recent Sonesta filings.

"The name has brought a cachet to certain areas that wouldn't have had it," Trump said of Sunny Isles, where vacations once centered around discount motels.

That's the hope for Fort Lauderdale, which wants the influx of luxury hotels like the Atlantic to bury its reputation as a cut-rate destination for spring breakers. Stillman described Trump as a fitting vehicle for the city's new upscale image.

"I've got to tell you," Stillman added, "what he forgot about marketing, I may never know."

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