

Q+A: ATIRE founders on group's cross-culture appeal

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The Association of Toronto Italians in Real Estate is approaching its one-year anniversary



Toronto's commercial real estate industry is brimming with professional networks, from cultural organizations to investment groups to owners associations.

So, in early 2025, when the Association of Toronto Italians in Real Estate launched to great fanfare from Italians and non-Italians alike, its founding members quickly realized the value in what they'd created.

A celebration of heritage and an educational tool, a platform for connection and a place for mentorship, ATIRE aims to unite members across the real estate industry, regardless of culture or career stage.

As the group approaches its one-year anniversary, *Green Street News* sat down with four of its founders – Prologis' Massimo Bozzo, Salthill Capital's Rose D'Ascanio, Manulife Investment Management's Marco Elia and BGO's Amedeo Prete.

The group discussed the inspiration behind ATIRE, the unexpected acceptance and unforeseen challenges of the first year, and the vision that will guide them, alongside fellow founders Turner & Townsend Cavalieri's Johnpaul Antidormi, JLL's Christina Karam and OTA Group's Anthony Ottavino, moving forward.

What inspired you to start ATIRE? How did you all get connected?

Massimo Bozzo: Several of us had been discussing the idea independently. Johnpaul [Antidormi] and I were exploring the idea of an organization whereby we could bring together Italian commercial real estate professionals for networking and to celebrate our shared culture. Through mutual friends, the founders of SPIRE [Serbian Professionals in Real Estate], we were introduced to Amedeo [Prete], Marco [Elia] and Anthony [Ottavino], who were pursuing the same vision. This shared passion led to an organic and exciting collaboration.

Marco Elia: We knew things weren't getting off the ground without Rose and Christina [Karam]. Between Rose's extensive background in marketing and communications, and Christina's experience as one of the founders of CRE8, they were both instrumental in making this real.

Rose D'Ascanio: When Marco brought me the opportunity to join, it was a no-brainer. My job is to bring great ideas to life, and this felt like the perfect moment to join ATIRE and help make it happen.

Elia: I made it very clear from the start that I did not want this to be a boys' club. The whole idea was to get women involved and make sure that it's for everybody. It's supposed to be for all different ages, all different stages of your career.

It seems like everything fell into place very well.

Amedeo Prete: It all came together so quickly. After we launched the LinkedIn page, we had a couple hundred people join within the first week. The enthusiasm was incredible – it really pushed us to move fast, host our first events and start shaping what we wanted this organization to become.

Were you surprised by that?

Prete: It honestly caught me off guard – I wasn't expecting such an incredible response. The feedback from the Italian community has been amazing, and even people outside the community have been so supportive and enthusiastic. It really showed us that this was something people wanted and needed, and it

encouraged us to keep building it.

D’Ascanio: The positive response from the non-Italian community really opens the door to an opportunity. There are many dated stereotypes about Italians in real estate, and ATIRE can help change that by educating others about our culture and how it connects with the industry in positive ways.

“It really showed us that this was something people wanted and needed, and it encouraged us to keep building it”

Why do you think there are so many Italians in commercial real estate?

Bozzo: First, it’s a deserved tribute to our ancestors. Just two or three generations ago, Italian immigrants were among the driving forces behind the construction and development that shaped the [Greater Toronto Area] and Ontario. As Italians, we carry a deep pride in upholding that legacy. Second, there’s a natural affinity in our community for the warm, outgoing and engaging personalities that thrive in real estate

Elia: We’re a culture that really thrives on community and bringing people together.

Bozzo: Yes. And you have to have that in this industry. So, it’s partially a sense of pride, and then partially ingrained in our DNA, if you will.

Prete: I’m here completely by accident. I actually wanted to be a baseball player – but clearly, that didn’t pan out.

“We’re a culture that really thrives on community and bringing people together”

What are some unexpected challenges you’ve faced?

D’Ascanio: Think about what you know of Italian personality stereotypes. Then put seven of them in a group together. Not all together unexpected, but a

challenge, nonetheless.

Bozzo: Trying to navigate the fact that this is not an exclusive organization. That's been the one point of sensitivity that we are very acutely aware of. I think it's important that the broader commercial real estate community is aware that our intent is to celebrate culture, not create an exclusive club. And I think that speaks to the kind of people we are; we're proud of our heritage, and we want to celebrate it with Italians and non-Italians.

Prete: ATIRE may be culturally focused, but it's open to everyone. To me, it's not a wall — it's a bridge. It's about connection, about sharing stories and celebrating the values and voices that bring people together and shape who we are.

Your At the Table event seems like it was a big hit. What programming are you planning for next year?

Prete: There's a lot of thought that goes into every event we host. We're very intentional about who we invite to speak and the theme or hallmark we build each event around. It's not just another cocktail hour or networking event where you're left figuring out who to talk to about what — we want every gathering to have purpose. By giving each event a clear focus, we encourage real discussion and create experiences that add genuine value for our members.

D'Ascanio: Our goal is to deliver real value. As we plan next year's events, we're looking closely at market trends, reviewing what worked this year, and listening to member feedback. One thing is certain — At the Table will remain an annual event.

Big picture, what's your vision for ATIRE?

Elia: Our goal is to create meaningful opportunities for those entering and established in the industry. We want every member to feel supported through mentorship and guidance from ATIRE. Beyond professional growth, we strive to foster joy and genuine connection by celebrating shared culture and community. This is a space where people can come together to develop relationships and feel confident in their industry journey.

Prete: I see ATIRE as a place for people at every stage of their careers — from those just starting out to those in senior roles, later in their careers or even in active retirement — to come together and stay connected [with] the CRE community. For me, it's more than an organization; it's something I hope

becomes a legacy — a way to give back, to stay connected and to keep our shared stories and values alive.

Bozzo: The moment the seven of us met to first discuss ATIRE, it felt like family. We'd crossed paths before, but never truly connected. Yet it felt like family almost immediately. We genuinely enjoy each other's company, while also turning to one another for professional guidance. That's the guiding principle behind ATIRE: a space where members find both personal camaraderie and career mentorship, forging lasting and fruitful relationships.

D'Ascanio: We want to bring people together to a place where everyone feels welcome.