

## Muller Co. Property Manager Aids In Office Space Rehab

By MONICA UNHOLD

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Turning troubled commercial properties into desirable office space is Christina DuCoté's passion.

As a senior property manager for The Muller Co., DuCoté enjoys the array of challenges her job presents. The company specializes in troubled properties, many with deferred maintenance issues and high vacancy rates.

"Every property is different, and each comes with its own challenges and opportunities," DuCoté said.

Many of the buildings she manages require substantial construction, or even rebuilding. DuCoté enjoys working with contractors on such projects.

DuCoté is currently overseeing the last phase of construction in the business park located off North Torrey Pines Road that The Muller Co. currently occupies. While BYCOR General Contractors can be heard hammering away down the hall, DuCoté looks out through the sliding glass doors of her office at a recently completed building she also manages.

What was once an outdated and crumbling building with a 50 percent vacancy rate is now a 100 percent leased attractive modern structure.

The approximately \$5 million project involved demolishing most of the original structure and rebuilding in place. Construction costs were cut by using many of the existing structural supports and beams, DuCoté said.

The project was honored with a number of awards, including a Building of the Year award from the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA). Winning elements of the building include its natural decor and water and energy-conserving features. The offices are decorated with travertine stone, mahogany wood doors, recycled material from the previous building on the site and a glass panel pressed with Torrey Pines needles gathered from the surrounding area, DuCoté said.

"Tenants love that there is an element of nature everywhere you look," DuCoté said.

In addition to the organic elements incorporated in the building's interior, The Muller Co. also strove to achieve harmony with the building's natural setting. DuCoté oversaw a \$1.5 million investment into drought tolerant landscaping and recycled water systems that serve to both cut upkeep costs and "bring back a habitat to the office park," DuCoté said.

As she gazed out the window of her office a rabbit ran by -- an exciting sign the business park is beginning to return to nature, she said.



Christina DuCoté

DuCoté believes the Torrey Pines office park may be the largest commercial user of recycled water in the city of San Diego.

“We’re making history here,” she said.

Sustainable buildings such as those owned by The Muller Co. in Torrey Pines are becoming increasingly more desirable, particularly with biotech firms and government agencies, DuCoté said. One building in the cluster houses a high-tech lab for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

DuCoté has a lease rate of 91 to 99 percent with the more than 1 million square feet of commercial and industrial space she currently manages. She attributes her success in part to her ability to perceive what stable tenants desire.

Her lease rate is even more impressive in a market where commercial vacancies average 20 percent to 30 percent.

Because of the down market, The Muller Co. is working to help banks manage troubled assets rather than seeking out new acquisitions, DuCoté said.

Though she leads a busy professional life, DuCoté also enjoys spending time with her husband and 2-year-old son and is looking forward to her upcoming involvement with the nonprofit Restart.

The program trains battered women in property management and assists them in finding jobs. The women’s families are able to achieve financial stability with the help of volunteers such as DuCoté, who will serve as an educator.

With 12 years of experience in property management and numerous professional credentials, DuCoté feels it’s time to give back, she said.

“It’s a great program,” DuCoté said. “I’m excited to be involved.”