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Feinberg thinks outside the big box for his second act

New Mexico Business Weekly - by [Steve Ginsberg](#) Special to NMBW

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Bob Feinberg

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Bob Feinberg is on the phone in his office, the largest and most elaborate at **Grubb & Ellis New Mexico**. He's on a conference call with Israeli manufacturers of a clean water technology and is trying to convince them they don't need distributors to crack the U.S. market. Two of their global distributors are part of the call.

"Some of my deals take three to five years and can fall apart at the last minute. I don't mind getting frustrated. I'm going to win some and I'm going to lose fewer ... I can get a government entity to approve a product, screw the distributor, please pardon my language, Carmello ... We bring meat to the table, but they [distributors] want to cut it up, but if we didn't bring that meat to the table, nobody would be eating ... The world of water is mine to conquer."

The call ends with Feinberg saying he will fly to Minneapolis or Denver or wherever he needs to go to convince Fortune 500 companies and municipalities that Israeli clean water technology can solve America's water issues.

Feinberg has spent 25 years bringing big box retailers like Walmart and Lowe's to New Mexico and now that recession has slowed big box expansion, he is not the least hesitant to think he can diversify and sell a new product.

"If you can schmooze, you can sell any product. It can be apples, oranges or waste water technology."

His chutzpah and moxie has led to near legendary success in the commercial real estate brokerage field. A partner with a 10 percent stake in G&E New Mexico, he has been among the top brokers nationally in Grubb & Ellis' national rankings, yet works in the Duke City, a tertiary market.

He and partner Tom Jones alone account for between 25 percent to a third of the Albuquerque firm's commission income. His cumulative transactions have a value approaching \$1 billion. His best year was 2000, when he logged nearly \$115 million and in recessionary 2008, did a more than respectable \$96 million.

Feinberg often works both the buyer and seller sides of a deal, cutting out other brokers and making foes along the way.

"My job is to make my client happy; I don't need another ego to be the hero that I want to be."

By selling land to a big box giant, Feinberg makes the commission on the land sale, then follows it up by leasing out the center that evolves from the big box anchor. When the developer sells the mall, Feinberg has been in on those deals as well. To get clients interested in New Mexico, he will join far-flung boards like Mexico City's **Mexican Grocers Association**, which led to **Pro's Ranch Market's** arrival at Atrisco and Central.

Feinberg's newest water venture is called Noaz Sourcing Ltd. Co. It has an agreement with **Sandia National Laboratories** to see if the Israeli technology can work in the Española and Ramah water basins. He hosted a water technology conference earlier this year at **Hotel Andaluz** to promote the new venture. In Hebrew, Noaz can be an adjective for fearless, plucky, risqué, foolhardy, brash and daring. Feinberg, 59, has been all that and more.

When other nine-year-olds were playing Little League baseball or taking piano lessons, Feinberg was

backstage at the **Tropicana Hotel** watching the Folies Bergère rehearse. His father ran the Tropicana Hotel on the Vegas strip in the 1960s and the 600 people who showed at Feinberg's bar mitzvah included alleged mobsters from Cleveland and actor Phil Silvers.

After attending a military high school in Carlsbad, Calif., Feinberg spent a year at Menlo College in California before becoming a hippie with a big afro. Today he sports a shiny pate, a la Telly Savalas. He spent a decade on the wild side, first as a gopher for avante garde jazzman Cannonball Adderley, sharing roach clips with music legends at the **Monterey Jazz Festival**, where he was the sound man. Feinberg said he met Janis Joplin in Los Angeles hours before she died of an overdose. By age 22, Feinberg was dressed in a tux, dealing baccarat at Caesars Palace, a job that paid \$150,000 in tips and led to a higher life.

"Sinatra, Adnan Khashoggi, Don King, sheiks, princes and drug lords from South America were at the table. These were big money games. They were playing quarter million dollar hands every seven seconds. People would pay \$50,000 to get the job I had."

The money led to fast cars, faster women and one night he asked his father what all the money meant. His father blew a cloud of smoke in his face and said, "Money is for spending."

Feinberg admits he has been a poor manager of his money ever since, but is indebted to his father for giving him the street smarts and work ethic to make it.

A baccarat dealer's lifestyle can lead to burnout and Feinberg buried five of his best friends. He knew he could be next and went to Israel to detoxify. A year on a kibbutz, where he picked fruit and cleaned chicken coops, brought him back to reality. After driving a cab in Vegas for a year, a family friend there invited him to Angel Fire to start a real estate venture, and he arrived in New Mexico in 1984. He talked his way into a residential sales job for Ed Norris. When a call came in one weekend from someone looking to buy commercial property, Feinberg said he could handle it. He put **Rocky Mountain RV** in a former mobile home park site and earned his first big commission check, for \$21,000.

"It was the first legitimate check in my life. I was done with residential."

In his office that includes a terracotta tile wall, Feinberg's awards and plaques for his charitable good deeds for Jewish organizations reflect on his successful 25 year run, but he has been far from bulletproof.

In 2009, Feinberg tried to bring Israeli companies to a planned new industrial park adjoining the Spaceport in southern New Mexico, but the project never gained traction. Then, a messy divorce and personal bankruptcy filing early this decade led to unwelcome publicity.

Health-wise, Feinberg operates on 50 percent lung capacity, yet says his competitive advantage is, "my competitors need sleep." He takes vitamins, but says his manic energy stems from his love of solving problems for his clients.

Despite setbacks, Feinberg has been resilient. Perhaps the best deal he ever made was selling his First Commercial brokerage to the former Grubb & Ellis | Lewinger Hamilton. The deal fused two companies, creating G&E New Mexico in 2004. It allowed Feinberg to focus on brokerage and let someone else handle the day-to-day finances and minutiae of running a brokerage. The deal gave him a stake in a national affiliate brand and a partial interest in the firm's 2424 Louisiana NE Class A office building.

John Lewinger, a partner and former Grubb & Ellis N.M. CEO, has followed Feinberg's career arc and said he has matured on many levels. As a broker, Lewinger said Feinberg has the uncanny knack of seeing an undeveloped piece of land and putting buildings together.

"Retailers work on demographics, but Bob wants to show them the bigger picture. He took up a CEO [Arthur Blank of **Home Depot**] in a helicopter to show him Albuquerque, to romance him and to make the deal," Lewinger said.

"When I got involved with him five years ago, he came across as Mr. Flamboyant, but I've seen him put two kids through college and he is a very different person."

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