Three leaders inducted into 2021 Distinguished Leaders Circle

Three trailblazers, who’ve reached the pinnacle of their long careers. Three amazing leaders, who’ve paved the path for many in the profession. Three mentors, who’ve given their time, knowledge, and expertise to push the profession and CoreNet Global forward. It is because of these accomplishments that John Igoe, SLCR, Trex Morris, MCR, and Randy Smith, MCR, SLCR, will be inducted into the Distinguished Leaders Circle in 2021.

These corporate real estate (CRE) leaders will be honored in an induction ceremony at the CoreNet Global Summit Recognition Dinner in Seattle on November 9th.

The Distinguished Leaders Circle is designed to pay tribute to those members who have demonstrated a lifetime of leadership that has helped define and shape the corporate real estate profession through their body of work. While CoreNet Global has a number of awards based upon individual or group performance on a particular project or for a given year, the association had yet to recognize those who have career-long legacies of service and leadership within the association – and the profession as a whole.

This recognition is deemed the highest honor to be bestowed upon a member.

To learn more about the Distinguished Leaders Circle, its selection criteria and application process, visit www.corenetglobal.org.

John Igoe, SLCR
Director of Design and Construction, Northern California, Google
Keep it simple and have a plan. That's John Igoe, SLCR's philosophy. Igoe has been in and around the corporate real estate (CRE) profession for a long time, and his association with CoreNet Global is deep. Igoe was Treasurer and Member of the Board of Directors of the International Development Research Council (IDRC), a predecessor organization of CoreNet Global, and has been a member of CoreNet Global since its inception. According to Dick Palomba, Principal at Corporate Planning Consultants, Inc., “John has always had the members’ interests at heart, and he was there to steer the organization when needed. In fact, he was also part of the National Association of Corporate Real Estate Executives (NACORE) and IDRC integration team.”

The CRE Beginning

Igoe’s corporate career started in property development with the United States Air Force where he was part of the project management team for SR71. Not many can claim that they got their start in CRE because they were recruited by Steve Jobs, but that is exactly how Igoe entered the profession. “I was recruited by Steve to work at NEXT,” says Igoe. From there Igoe went on to Octel, where they were looking to build their corporate campus. In fact, one of Igoe’s early CRE successes came at Octel, where he and his team were building Octel’s campus from scratch, when they were acquired by another company. Part of the acquisition process, and something that Igoe is very proud of, is the fact that the process was very smooth. “A big part of what we had to do, and ensure, was that the data transfer happened seamlessly,” says Igoe.

Today, Igoe is an integral part of the CRE team at Google, where he has been Director of Design and Construction, Northern California for the past 10 years. At Google, Igoe has overseen projects around the globe, including in Europe and the U.S. One of Igoe’s projects has been building domed offices for Google, something that has never been done for office buildings at this scale before. According to Mary Davidge, former Director of Design and Construction, Workplace Services at Google, who worked for Igoe for many years, “John is a pioneer in the real estate and construction industries. He has a unique quality of being a visionary, while also being able to deliver large complex projects. Not many, who are visionaries, are good at actualizing their ideas. That is why his career has been so stellar, and why he has accomplished so much.” For Igoe, planning is a key part of how to achieve success. When asked about how to accomplish and attain one’s goals, Igoe pointed to the need to keep it simple, while also having a solid roadmap and knowing how to navigate that roadmap. “This is crucial, not only for yourself, but it is especially important if you are working with and leading a team. Everyone needs to know where they are going. There needs to be a common alignment of goals and a keen understanding of what the team is trying to achieve.”

One thread that comes through Igoe’s entire career is his passion for innovation and his ability to push others to innovate as well. For example, he has been a pioneer and an advocate for increased use of technology in the construction industry, which, according to Sven Pole, Vice Chairman, CBRE, benefits everyone. Pole adds, “John has pushed and encouraged the use of Building Information Management Systems (BIMS) on his construction projects and given his position and the scope of projects at Google this creates a domino effect across the profession. If everyone is using the same technology, it allows for smoother planning and tracking.”

For CRE professionals, workplace strategy, culture and the impact on talent recruitment, retention and productivity have been an integral part of the job description for some time now, and here too, Igoe was able to be a forward-thinking leader. Google was one of the first organizations to draw the correlation between workspaces and happy and healthy employees. Igoe and the team he led and worked with were at the forefront of this revolution, and “transcended real estate as we knew it,” adds Pole.

The Mentor, The Leader, The Learner

There is no “I” in success or team, and Igoe knows that. Leading comes as naturally to him as do planning and innovating. Igoe’s approach to leading is about being fair, being consistent, and being true to your word. “CRE is not easy and comes with many challenges, and you need to be able to gain your team’s trust, and stick to your principles,” adds Igoe. Leading also means mentoring and pushing your team to be its best, as well as empowering them to take charge of their projects. This is something that Davidge has seen Igoe do many times. “If you look at the scope of his impact, and include not just his direct reports, but also the many, many team members on his construction projects, his influence is immense,” she adds.

Igoe has also been a keen learner, throughout his career, and has the SLCR designation from CoreNet Global. His philosophy is that one needs to keep educating oneself and keeping up with new ideas and research. He credits his long and successful career, partly to his keen understanding of the profession, inside out. Being able to diversify what you know is key, he says, adding, “You need to know how maintenance and operations work, and you need to understand finance and how CRE impacts the business’ bottom line. CRE leaders also need to have some legal acumen. You don’t need to be a lawyer, but you do need to know and understand legal jargon and be able to speak to lawyers.” However, in the end, he says, it’s about people and what the customer needs, and that is something that a CRE leader should never forget.

Igoe's dedication to learning can also be seen in his
desire to push those he leads to succeed and better themselves. He has encouraged his team to continue learning, whether through CoreNet Global’s programs and events, or through other avenues. Additionally, as part of his dedication to giving back, Igoe has been an Adjunct Professor at Golden Gate University for 22 years, as well as a guest lecturer at Stanford University, the University of California and Villanova University, among others.

In Palomba’s words, “John is humble, kind, caring, genuine and very deserving of this recognition.”

**Beyond CRE**

Outside of work, and CRE, Igoe spent most of this time volunteering and enjoying his family. He and his wife of 55 years, Peggy, have 5 children and 13 grandchildren. Some of Igoe’s fondest memories are of family vacations where the entire clan comes together to spend time, cook, and poke fun at each other. For Igoe and Peggy, creating those memories for their children and their grandchildren is of paramount importance, as is supporting them unconditionally.

Igoe also likes to give back, where he can. In addition to teaching and mentoring, Igoe has been involved with Little League Baseball, as well as at various levels in the Archdiocese of San Francisco’s school system and was a member of the Board of Directors of the Alumni Association of Villanova University for more than 6 years. Igoe adds, “You cannot overstate how much that means to these organizations, and how your time goes a long way, when it comes to volunteering.”
Not every corporate real estate (CRE) leader begins his or her career in CRE. That is the case with Trex Morris, MCR. Morris, who today is a veteran of the profession, started off in the sales and support division of IBM. However, like many leaders before him, once he encountered CRE, he was hooked. “My first exposure came when the local branch office at IBM was in the process of looking for a new location. I was on the steering committee, and it was exciting to look at locations and taking into consideration where our clients were and where our people were. This was a new venture for me,” says Morris.

Putting the Leader in Leadership

After joining the CRE team at IBM a few years later Morris hasn’t looked back. Following 16 years at IBM, he joined EY in 1996, where he was brought in to lead the US Real Estate Portfolio of EY Consulting. Shortly after, Morris was promoted to support the management of all EY Real Estate in North America, and in 2010, he was charged with creating an EY Global real estate team and supporting EY member firms in managing the global portfolio in more than 150 countries and 750 locations. Morris’ long tenure as the EY Global Real Estate Leader is a testament to his leadership, skills, expertise, and knowledge. For Larry Phelan, EY Chief Supply Chain Officer, and Morris’ manager, there are a few things that stood above the rest when it comes to Morris’ leadership qualities. Says Phelan, “Trex is passionate - about the real estate profession, his EY teammates and his family. He is very competitive, enjoys what he does and wants to have fun with it. He is also very positive, and sees the glass at 95% full, focusing on leveraging the good to build a strong foundation. And he is a problem fixer and very people focused. A consummate team player, Trex is focused on the continued strength and development of the team.”

For Morris, that positivity and desire to be at the top has meant grabbing the bull by the horns, figuring out solutions and learning on the go. When he was asked to be the EY Global Real Estate lead a decade or so back, Morris says, “I had some international experience, but not as much as now. The new role meant understanding inventory, understanding the team, the leases, and putting in new procedures – those were important wins for me. EY is a mature organization, and a lot of what the CRE organization was doing was very intuitive to them, but it is still important to put that framework in.”

It was also critical, from Morris’ point of view, to get the data structures in place, and making sure that CRE was able to deliver consistently across the board. “EY is a global organization and part of being a global organization is the commitment to the local firms. In that situation, it’s imperative to learn what the key concerns are. It also means that all the KPIs we said we would be able to deliver, were delivered globally,” adds Morris.

Another key achievement for Morris was the implementation of the “Workplace of the Future Program,” or what is now known as “EY @ Work.” The aim was to align workplace, HR, FM, and IT under one umbrella, giving employees a seamless experience, whether they were in the office or outside the office. Today, that program has translated to most employees being hybrid. According to David Kamen, MCR, immediate Past Chair of the CoreNet Global Board of Directors and Americas Real Estate Services Leader – Business Enablement at EY, this program and how Morris led it really goes to the heart of Morris as a leader. “Trex’s creation and leadership on this program is seen as one of the foundations and archetype for global workplace programs for the profession, and the way he organized it is best in class and something that I’ve emulated in my programs. However, and this speaks to his humility, as well as his business vision and leadership – it was never branded as real estate’s “Workplace of the Future,” but has always been a collaborative program, supported by HR, Finance, FM, IT, and co-sponsored by our global CEO and board. He knew that without their buy in and support and without delivering this as a business initiative it wouldn’t have been as successful.” Kamen adds, “To me this is one of the foundations of success of the program, that it’s driven by CRE but it’s a business initiative to enable people to work successfully. It’s been one of our global real estate team’s most impactful business successes.”

This program is also at the heart of how EY has pivoted during the pandemic. According to Morris, the pandemic, which he would consider as one of the most significant challenges of his career, has thrown light on the fact that one doesn’t always have to travel, and that there is strength in leveraging EY resources across the globe, such as architects and project managers. “In the end what we’ve seen is a depth of resiliency in the global CRE team. That has been great to see,” he adds.

CRE and the CoreNet Global Community

Morris has been very much involved with CoreNet Global right from the start of his career. He was a member of both the International Development Research Council (IDRC) and NACORE International before CoreNet Global came into existence and has stayed involved through chapter and global board roles. Matt Fanoe, past Chair of the CoreNet Global Board of Directors and former Vice President Real Estate at Coca-Cola Refreshments, credits Morris for mentoring him through his transition from finance to the head of CRE for Coca-Cola. “Not only did he take me under his wing professionally, but he also championed me as I made my way
on to the global board and provided guidance and counsel when I became chair of the board,” adds Fanoe.

For Kamen, Morris’ expertise and experience and the fact that he is willing to share his wisdom freely is what really makes him stand out. In addition, allowing and encouraging team members to utilize their time and contribute to continuing education, learning and time spent with organizations such as CoreNet Global, whether at the chapter or the global board level, like Kamen did, is a key part of Morris’ contribution and commitment to the profession and the organization. “This is just one type of continuous learning that Trex has made foundational for our group,” Kamen adds.

Furthermore, Morris’ stature within EY also highlights the strategic importance and value of the CRE profession. As Phelan says, “Trex has worked tirelessly to elevate the brand of the Real Estate Services team across EY to a function recognized and valued by leadership and linked to revenue generation and people strategies.”

For Fanoe, who counts Morris as a true professional and personal friend, this recognition is very much deserved, especially given the humility and integrity that Morris has shown throughout his career.

Work-life balance

Morris’ biggest passion outside of work is his family, consisting of his wife of over 40 years, Holly, his two sons and 5 grandchildren, with another on the way. They get to see the fun side of him, says Morris. With all the grandchildren under 6, playing with them and keeping them entertained is a blast. Other than family, Morris enjoys golfing, as well as fishing and paddleboarding. “During the pandemic, I commuted between Atlanta and the Florida panhandle, and took ample advantage of the water and the weather to hone my paddleboarding skills.” Finally, Morris says, he is an avid sportsman, and loves to throw the ball around, whenever he gets the chance.
Not many leaders reach the pinnacle of their career quite the way Randy Smith, MCR, SLCR did. When Smith retired recently, he was the Global Vice President of Real Estate and Facilities for Oracle, a role that meant leading the charge for all of Oracle’s facilities globally. His career at Oracle began approximately 30 years back, in what was his third job out of college. ‘I'd applied for what was to be a role in lease administration, but 15 minutes into the interview, I realized they were, in fact, interviewing me for a completely different role,’ says Smith. That role – project management for construction – turned out to be the start of a very long, accomplished and successful stint for Smith. He oversaw a corporate real estate (CRE) organization that went from providing facilities for 5,000 people, when he started, to over 140,000 when he retired.

The CRE Leader – inside and out

During the span of his career, Smith took advantage of every learning opportunity that came his way. “I have been in every role, from facilities manager and project manager to building manager. I got the opportunity to explore and expand the management side and to really understand every role under me,” Smith adds. That, according to him, is also one of the keys to leading and to being successful in the profession. Among his many accomplishments, Smith is particularly proud of having consolidated the various teams that make up CRE into one global organization. Another milestone triumph was advocating and pushing for the global application of Oracle’s property management software. While it was initially only used in the USA, and eventually implemented globally, this was a plan that came with many challenges. Says Smith, “It meant really understanding the terms and conditions on the local level. It also meant ensuring that the accounting and IT teams were on top of what we were doing and on board as well. Finally, it took 6 months of travelling internationally and training the teams on the ground to ensure they knew how to use the software, for it to become a success.” This project is what propelled Smith to the top of Oracle’s CRE organization.

According to Bill Roberts, former CoreNet Global Board Director, Smith’s acumen in understanding the business side of things is one of the things that made him such an exceptional leader. Roberts says, “Randy had the business’ trust and their ear. They understood that his insights as the CRE leader were critical, and, in fact, Randy even collaborated with the internal product development teams to consult and give his input on some of Oracle’s software which is used by CRE professionals.” Michelle Myer, MCR, SLCR, current Chairwoman of the CoreNet Global Board of Directors and VP Americas Real Estate, Oracle America, Inc., concurs, adding “What makes Randy stand out is his business acumen. He knows the industry so well and understands how impactful CRE projects are for the business.”

Amongst other critical successes for Smith was the acquisition of PeopleSoft by Oracle, which meant consolidating two global portfolios and teams. The massive project called for a new system to aid in tracking. According to Smith, the systems and tools that were put into place then have had a few updates but are still holding and are used by Oracle’s CRE teams. Finally, under Smith, Oracle was also one of the few organizations that kept a large internal CRE team, with minimal outsourcing. This has given Oracle a team with longevity and loyalty. According to Mike Bangs, VP Real Estate and Facilities HQ, Oracle America, Inc., who worked for Smith for a number of years, “Randy went against the trend, when it came to outsourcing. He believed in that institutional memory that comes when teams stick around. And it shows! There are some very long tenured team members at Oracle, and that’s partly also because Randy believed in promoting from within and giving people opportunities.” Bangs adds that this has also meant that while Randy was at Oracle, he had the trust and loyalty of team members from the top to the bottom.

However, this is also how Smith leads. For him leadership means setting the stage for people to succeed and giving them the opportunity to do their thing. He recalls, during one of his first roles as a manager, “After one of my first staff meetings, one team member came to me and said that I should spend less time telling people what to do, and more time listening to them.” This is advice, Smith says, he took to heart throughout his career. For him, listening to diverse voices has been an important part of leading.

It is the softer side of leadership which also makes Smith stand out amongst other leaders. According to Bangs, “Randy really cares about you. He cares about your family and your pets, and he will ask about them. He is also willing to share, which helps in building trust.”

Seizing opportunities, learning and mentoring

For Smith, learning and taking those opportunities where they come is imperative. From his perspective, “You need to be willing to put yourself in a position to learn. CRE is vast and allowing yourself to look for those problems and issues
which might arise and then seeking solutions to them, is how you learn and grow. If you want to go up the ladder, understanding all the various elements of the organization you manage is of paramount importance,” he adds.

Another aspect that Smith sees as critical is mentoring, developing and encouraging team members to seek out opportunities. According to Myer, “Randy encouraged more than 100 people on his team to join and complete CoreNet Global’s designation programs such as MCR, SLCR. Many of his team were chapter leaders, committee members and actively engaged in the organization.” In fact, Smith’s passion for learning and ensuring others have that opportunity meant that when he was Chairman of CoreNet Global’s Board of Directors, he advocated for, and was closely involved with, the creation of CoreNet Global’s “The Essential Guide to Corporate Real Estate,” which he sees as a cornerstone of basic CRE education. Smith’s commitment to learning has also led him to teach an MCR capstone class and be closely involved in Oracle’s Design Tech High School project, including its formation, execution and impact.

For Roberts, Smith has been a CRE leader with a capital “C” across multiple areas that make a complete leader, actively supporting and making significant contributions within his Company, in his Community and certainly within CoreNet Global.

Enjoying Retirement

For Smith, who is recently retired, an important part of not working was moving to be closer to Lake Tahoe, where his family has a home. He is close to his parents and siblings and enjoys spending time with his nieces and nephews. Depending on the season, Smith enjoys hiking and skiing at Lake Tahoe. Though, in recent weeks, Smith, who is a dog lover, is breaking in a new puppy. “That’s taking up a lot of my time,” Smith adds!