

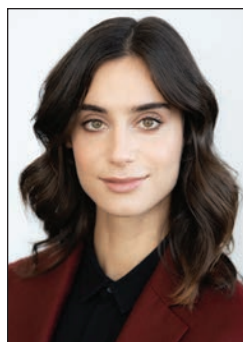
Obstacles to Opportunity

An Interview with Andi Potamkin,
Director of Business Development, Potamkin Companies



Potamkin's East Harlem development is a state-of-the-art, environmentally-conscious fleet maintenance facility that integrates seamlessly into the neighborhood and minimizes impact on the community.

EDITORS' NOTE Andi Potamkin is Director of Business Development at the Potamkin Companies. She specializes in developing automotive fleet facilities for tenants such as the City of New York, Time Warner Cable and affiliates of the MTA. Potamkin's role builds upon her diverse background and experience in design, planning and public presentation. She serves as a Board Member for the Potamkin Foundation which, among other philanthropic efforts, sponsors the Potamkin Prize for Research in Pick's, Alzheimer's, and Related Diseases. She is also a Trustee of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami and the Museum of Arts & Design in Manhattan, as well as an active supporter of the Columbia University Department of Psychiatry research programs.



Andi Potamkin

COMPANY BRIEF Potamkin Companies was founded by Victor Potamkin in 1954. Originally the Potamkin Automotive Group, the family-owned business has greatly expanded nationwide.

The Potamkin name has a long history in New York. Will you highlight its history and how the company has evolved?

My grandfather, Victor, was a legendary entrepreneur and a quintessential New Yorker. His style and innovation made him one of the biggest names in the automotive industry. After college, my father and uncle joined the company and they grew the Potamkin Automotive Group into the largest privately-held automotive company in the nation. They began purchasing and developing real estate. We have continued to grow, incorporating new divisions within the Potamkin Companies. We have an entire division dedicated to development. This is my specialty – developing solutions for large automotive fleets. There aren't many women in the automotive development industry today.

Will you provide an overview of Potamkin Development's work in East Harlem with the City of New York?

We are developing a full city block into a state-of-the-art, environmentally conscious fleet maintenance facility. The block is split and designed for three different city services. With industrial development in highly-populated

areas, success often comes down to efficiency and sensitivity. We have to be conscious of the environmental impact as well as the needs of urban infrastructure. City services like sanitation, police, fire protection and environmental protection all have maintenance and storage needs for their vehicles. These services need proximity to the community they serve, but that is often taken for granted. At Potamkin Development, we look for ways to meet those needs in a manner that integrates seamlessly

into the neighborhood and minimizes impact on the community. We ask the right questions. We find the best way to make use of limited space, developing creative solutions to 21st century problems.

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What was Potamkin's history with this property?

We purchased the property in 1998 and built a grouping of automotive dealerships. We had dealerships for General Motors, Chevrolet, Saturn, Cadillac and Hummer franchises. When the 2008 recession hit the automotive industry hard, GM filed for bankruptcy and a number of franchises were cancelled. We had this beautifully developed automotive facility and we had to think of other ways we could use it. When things don't go according to plan – and often they don't – necessity becomes the mother of invention.

What were the keys to being able to overcome the challenges that Potamkin faced at this site?

Small ships turn faster than large ones, so we were able to adjust course, which is important. As a private and family-owned organization, the Potamkin Companies are adaptable. We threw ourselves into negotiations with major corporations and presentations to different divisions of the City. We worked with Community Boards and City Planning Commissions. I was regularly at City Hall. It was an exciting challenge.

Our development in Harlem is a state-of-the-art maintenance center which serves vehicle needs in an efficient manner. We've made a small amount of space act like a large amount of space. We are currently finalizing the design of a custom automotive stacker system for an affiliate of the MTA. The stackers are engineered to hold extremely heavy vehicles which have the ability to lift people in wheelchairs.

How important is it for Potamkin to be engaged in the communities where it operates?

As a developer, you have a large impact on the growth of the neighborhood. It is a responsibility. People are strongly affected by their surroundings, so it's important to engage with the community. Shapes of buildings, materials that are used, how citizens move throughout the area, all should be considered in the planning process. We respect the environment of the neighborhood. We also sponsor multiple projects where we build developments. Uptown Grand Central is a non-profit dedicated to the revitalization of the 125th Street Metro North corridor. We give out hundreds of turkeys every Thanksgiving. We recently sponsored a public art program. It's important that we have a direct connection to the area. ●