

Chattanooga Magazine's 2009 Entrepreneur of the Year

THIS YOUNG PROFESSIONAL PUTS A NEW SPIN ON PROPERTY MANAGEMENT WITH GOOD LISTENING SKILLS AND PERSONALIZED SERVICE.

Resident Charm

Story by Joanna Dean
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I PREFER 'RESIDENTS'... TENANTS JUST LEASE, RESIDENTS LIVE." In a phrase, this sums up Tristin Chiafullo's modus operandi.



"It's full-service property management and leasing in the downtown residential housing market," she says re-wording the phrase several times in order to get it just right—to capture the essence of what she does. Detail oriented Tristin Chiafullo owns and operates her own business, Resident Property Management, and has a new take on the industry—it's something akin to a property management revolution. She has kept her business somewhat exclusive, customizing her service to the needs of individual clients and focusing on a specific, even trendy, area—downtown Chattanooga. Chiafullo's Resident Property Management takes a charming, boutique-like approach to the task of leasing and maintaining multiple properties.

Most people at some point in their lives have had the experience of renting an apartment or a house, or have tried to lease a property of their own, with varying degrees of success and possibly more than a little frustration. The stories are not unfamiliar and often involve disputes with property management companies over everything from a broken water line, to pest control. For the property owner, there are stories about the destructive tenant who has trashed the fire alarm or ruined the carpet, and moved off still owing a month's rent. Of course, it happens and it's why good property management is important.

It is apparent that Chiafullo's residents and the owners of the properties she manages are fortunate to have found her. Even as she answers questions for this article, a tenant passes by and stops to chat for a second. She maintains a rapport with clients that is an unusual one in this business—it's good. While most property management corporations are often known for being hard to reach, impersonal, and slow to respond to potential clients and tenant needs, Resident Property Management is a service-oriented business and aims to offer the same enthusiastic assistance to owners and residents alike.

"I have worked with other property management companies," says Chattanooga owner, Tony Leach. "They were not as prepared to communicate, organize, and do the preventative, routine maintenance tasks that are important to keep the property viable and to keep tenants happy."

With the sudden proliferation of condominiums in the downtown Chattanooga area, there is a real need to fill the space and an apparent need for rental housing. Among Chiafullo's residents are students, families, and couples who have relocated from out of town as well as young professionals who choose to live in downtown Chattanooga because of its proximity to work and school, its increasingly exciting nightlife, and the community feeling that goes along with living in the area.

Resident Property Management directly seeks to enhance Chattanooga's vibrant downtown by promoting local businesses and restaurants through word of mouth and other strategic collaborations. At last year's annual MainX24 festival, for example, Resident Property Management held a bag-board (the common lawn game) tournament offering BuyItDowntown gift cards, and donating entry fees to Habitat for Humanity.


Chiafullo is eager to recommend fun events and fabulous places for shopping and eating to her residents and to potential residents considering relocation.

Since Chattanooga's emergence in the past few years as an increasingly attractive place to live, it has topped plenty of lifestyle magazine lists of great places, and Chiafullo hopes that Resident Property Management will become a go-to business for newcomers. She specializes in smoothing the creases of the relocation process. With several clients already happily settled in Chattanooga from out of town, Tristan has some experience and would like to be able to usher more individuals and families into Chattanooga life by locating for them the perfect place to live, and going above and beyond to give them insider tips and link them to the community's "best-ofs" from restaurants to civic activities. To do all of this, she admits, "...you have to be able to relate to people, and good at deciphering how much someone wants to know—you have to be perceptive and listen."

When it comes to relocation, Chiafullo is one to know. Her love of Chattanooga, apparently was not inborn. Less than two years ago, she herself was a newcomer, and admits that the transition can be hard. She hails from New Castle, Pennsylvania, originally, and after working in commercial real estate management for several years in Pittsburgh, she was asked to come to Chattanooga to work for a local commercial real estate developer.

When she arrived for a four-day interview, she thought, "This is somewhere that I could live," and eventually decided to make the move. As the old adage goes, in order to sell something, you have to believe in it. And it's clear that she does.

"It's a liveable, walkable, bikeable friendly city," she says breathlessly. "You can wrap your arms around it." Chiafullo likes the fact that there are plenty of local shops and restaurants in the downtown area that add to the city's authenticity, as well as the friendliness of the people here. She's charmed by the pace of life, which is not as rushed as Chattanooga's northern counterparts. "You can have a very good quality of life here" she says, nearly a year and a half after her move.

Although the business is still relatively new, Resident Property Management currently oversees more than 10 properties and has around 42 units under management, including, among others, the Bread Factory Lofts and the Parkside Brownstones. RPM works with nearly 45 residents in the downtown area. Chiafullo is always on call to provide the link for specific services to individuals and families who are relocating to Chattanooga. Each property demands something different and each resident has unique needs. What is rare about Resident Property Management is that Chiafullo performs her work without assuming that a standard formula will work for every project. "People are different." 

"It's a liveable, walkable, bikeable friendly city. You can wrap your arms around it!"
—Tristin Chiafullo

For more information see www.residentrpm.com
Chiafullo's photo for this article was taken outside of the Crabtree Building on Williams Street. It was taken by RPM resident and photographer, Cristie Sims, owner of Beautiful By Cristie.