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Houston CRE exec: 'This has been the best downturn I've ever been through'

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A growing commercial real estate firm has brought on two Houston-based execs from NAI Partners as part of its new leasing team.

Doug Pack and Sam Hansen joined **Avison Young's** Houston office and will launch the firm's office project leasing team, Avison Young's principal and managing director Rand Stephens told the Houston Business Journal. Prior to joining NAI Partners, Hansen was a leasing director at Houston-based Hines for 12 years, and Pack served as director of leasing at Houston-based Boxer Property. The two make up Avison Young's project leasing team and will continue to grow the firm's 51-person office.

Stephens chatted with the Houston Business Journal about why now is the best time to launch a new office team and how Houston's current economic slump compares to the city's previous dips.

How long have you been thinking of launching an office leasing team?

We have a very strong office group, a very strong industrial group and we also had the opportunity to grow in investment sales through building sales, office building sales, industrial, retail and land. So, we have that part really well covered. What we've been missing is project leasing and project management. It hasn't been for lack of trying. In terms of bringing on Sam and Doug, that's been in the works for months. But as an office, we have been looking for someone to anchor the service line since we opened in Houston in 2010.

Why is now the best time to get into project leasing in Houston?

It's not a function of a timing of the market as much as it is just finding the right people. We're not sitting here thinking, "OK, we think there's a real opportunity to capitalize on market forces by bringing this team in." This is a long-term approach for us, and so is the business line we want to be in. We've grown through good times and bad times so we're not trying to time the market.

What submarkets do you hope to stake your claim in?



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Rand Stephens, principal and managing director of Avison Young's Houston office.

Houston is a big office market. I mean, a 200 million-square-foot market. There's tremendous opportunity. ... We're looking to be specialized and hands on. We'll be targeting Class A and Class B buildings and we will be in all the major submarkets. That's been Doug and Sam's focus and that's our focus. Just generally, we cover all the major submarkets: Energy Corridor, Galleria, downtown, Greenway and the State Highway 290 corridor. It will be very interesting when 290 gets finished. I think there will be some really good opportunities there for investors.

What's on the firm's radar for 2017?

I've been through all the major downturns and this has been the best downturn I've ever been through. I mean, it's amazing – on a net job growth basis, we have not lost a job. The Energy Corridor has lost a lot of high-paying jobs ... but we haven't had any net job loss. That's a big deal. Houston has held up remarkably well and it's a real testament to the city.

We've bottomed out economically in Houston. We're on a slight uptick. I believe that, and our brokers believe that, based on the activity they're seeing. But it's still a tough market.

Cara Smith

Reporter

Houston Business Journal

