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Veteran real estate execs launch Seattle consulting firm

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Longtime local real estate executives Jim Norman and Rob Larsen earlier this month formed a new consulting firm, Norman Partners.

The Seattle-based company will offer strategic planning and a range of other real estate services to companies with complex real estate needs. The company will partner with other firms as needed.

Both men have strong ties within the local real estate community.

Norman founded the Norman Company, one of the largest real estate brokerages in the region, and later sold it to Texas-based Trammell Crow Co. He also was a principal at Seattle-based real estate firm Wright Runstad & Co. and, more recently, MetPartners Real Estate Advisory Services.

For his part, Larsen has advised Boeing Co. and Microsoft Corp. on their real estate assets worldwide. He formed the Seattle consulting firm ClearPath Real Estate in 2002.

To help Norman Partners' clients deal with challenging real estate-related issues, Norman and Larsen are adapting a storyboarding technique that the Walt Disney Co. uses to create theme parks.

It's a technique that Larsen used successfully at ClearPath with help from a former head Disney engineer.

Disney, said Larsen, "builds what it builds by telling stories — the feelings (company executives) would like



Norman



Larsen

their customers to have. The engineers need to deliver on that experience."

"I became really enamored of his tools and was con-

vinced these were applicable to real estate facilities," Larsen said.

In filmmaking, storyboards are a series of rough sketches used to lay out the sequence of scenes and key plot changes. Norman and Larsen use storyboards as a means of graphically mapping out all the functions a real estate portfolio performs, creating what looks like a brightly colored, highly detailed flow chart. The chart lays out parallel time lines for achieving each of the client's goals for a real estate project.

Teams involved in a project are assigned a particular color, making it easy to tell at a glance who needs to be doing what.

"Everyone can see their role in the project," said Larsen. "The stories provide a road map."

For example, when Trinity Lutheran University was trying to figure out what to do with its Issaquah campus, Norman used storyboarding to help guide school administrators, staff and students through creating a long-range strategic plan for their real estate.

The procedure helped the group decide to sell its longtime campus in Issaquah and ultimately to relocate to Everett.