

MOVERS & SHAKERS

This column highlights promotions, transfers, hirings, awards won and other key personnel moves within the suburban real estate community. Send a brief biographical summary—including the towns of residence and employment and a black and white photo if desired—to: Movers and Shakers, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, 48150. Our fax number is (313) 591-7279.

Harrier joins Republic



Michelle Harrier has joined the Plymouth branch of Republic Bancorp Mortgage as a mortgage loan officer. She will be responsible for mortgage originations in the western suburbs with emphasis on single-family housing. Harrier graduated from Central Michigan University with a major in finance. She lives in Livonia. Previously, Harrier worked in the marketing department at New World Systems.

Rorabacher joins office



Ruby Rorabacher has joined the Michigan Group Livonia office as a sales associate. Rorabacher is a multi-million dollar sales producer. She lives in Northville.

Khami joins RE/MAX

Robert Khami has joined the real estate office of RE/MAX Executive Properties in Farmington Hills as a sales associate.

He has three years experience and will specialize in Novi, Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, Livonia, Canton and Plymouth.

Khami holds the professional designation of Certified Residential Specialist. He also holds degrees in aerospace and mechanical engineering.

Khami is a longtime resident of Farmington Hills.

Donaldson opens firm

Tammis Donaldson, RA, has opened the firm Ekotic Architecture in Rochester. The practice centers on commercial, residential and rehabilitation of historical projects.

Donaldson earned a bachelor of architecture degree from Lawrence Technological University and has 11 years of professional experience.

She lives in Rochester.

The Farmington Observer

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REAL ESTATE

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Monitoring government: Rebecca Williamson, head of the Western Wayne Oakland County Association of Realtors R/PAC, has always enjoyed the political arena.

Realtor PACs defend American Dream

By NORMAN PRADY
SPECIAL WRITER

The pathway to the American Dream, according to Rebecca Williamson's map, begins in a family room, passes under bowls of chowder and trays of Bloody Marys, intersects community service, then heads on into politics.

For Williamson, 36, the chairwoman of a Realtor political action committee (R/PAC), that dream is centered around home ownership. "We're exercising a voice," Williamson said of the R/PAC's work. "We lobby for property rights, the things that protect ownership."

With 12 years of waiting tables and washing dishes behind her, she has found that her life has evolved from serving soup to "doing a gallant thing that benefits the public."

As head of the Western Wayne Oakland County Association of Realtors R/PAC, Williamson would like to see all of the 2,400 members of her association contributing at least the recommended \$33 annually for the R/PAC's support of candidates and issues. She said she's about halfway there.

Williamson's dedication to causes gallant comes, she said, from a child hood filled with a parent-given awareness of the community-strengthening value of helping neighbors. It was a focus that took her, in 1989 at age 29, to a four-year term on the Walled Lake city council. "I was 'the kid,'" she said, describing how some people labeled her.

Now, it's a focus that continues and puts her on the Walled Lake zoning board of appeals, the downtown development authority, and formerly put

her on the Walled Lake building authority committee and the Oakland County Road and Bike Path committee. "I've always had that goal: to make the world better. And I guess the political arena is the place to do it."

She also holds major posts with Michigan Association of Realtors (MAR), the state organization to which her local association and others like it belong. Her work there has been in fund-raising, legislative relations, taxation issues, license law, and public education.

"I keep voting records, said Jack Walker, MAR vice president. "That's one of the determining factors in giving financial support or endorsement."

Bill Bonsky, chairman of the Birmingham Bloomfield Rochester South Oakland R/PAC, said, "Are we buying votes? With any direct donation to a public office candidate, the intent is to get someone who can help you."

"If it appears you're helping them buy their way into office, that's the nature of politics. That's part of the American system."

Bonky, a sales agent with Century 21 Associates, Rochester, said the R/PAC's goal is to maintain property values. To support statewide efforts, "the state (association) expects us to contribute our fair share — \$36,000 — which works out to about \$15 for each of our (2,400 active) members."

Dennis LaLone, chairman of the North Oakland County Board of Realtors R/PAC, said, "The Realtors association is really the only group out there that is involved in property rights issues and protection of those rights."

As an example, LaLone cites the "takings" issue, which is the devaluing of property as the result of a new regulation. "This might result, he explained, from the rezoning of a property resulting in limitation of its use or the type of structure permitted on it."

"We're not opposed to woodlands or wetlands" regulations, but "they can sometimes get too stringent, go overboard and devalue a piece of property."

LaLone, a Realtor with Max Brock Realtors in Clarkston, said that his R/PAC holds candidate interviews — as do other R/PACs — to determine which potential officeholders will be supportive of the members' views. An R/PAC can give up to \$2,500 to a candidate for the state house of representatives and up to \$5,000 to a state senatorial or federal office candidate, he said.

Williamson, who hopes to finish college before her daughter graduates from high school, wants to study real estate law. Her current position as a sales associate with Max Brock Realtors in West Bloomfield followed her entrance into the home-selling business at the invitation of some of her lunch-time regulars during her table waiting days at Nifty Norman's in Walled Lake.

The regulars, a group of real estate brokers, would speak to Williamson around the nachos and cocktails she was serving them. "What are you doing with your life?" they'd ask me.

They told her that they thought she had an ideal personality for their kind of work. Before long, she left "my last restaurant job" and, in 1988, began a new career with the diners' company,

from which she has since moved on. Soon after starting in real estate, she got involved with the R/PAC. She became chairwoman almost three years ago. She knows, she said, that "somebody's always going to question our motives."

To build support in her association, she and her group make presentations to members at their offices. "We try to educate them that this is insurance for their business — to make sure the conditions we're working in are good for us and for the homeowner."

She points to the need to strengthen the real estate licensing law relative to education and enforcement. More-effective policing is needed to protect against the forging of contracts and the embezzlement of purchase deposits, she said.

The R/PAC doesn't get involved with issues not directly related to property rights, she said.

A 3.7-grade-point student at Walled Lake Western High School, she praises the accomplishments of Krysten, 14, who carries the same average.

Working hard on her own program of home ownership, Williamson is close to paying off a vacant lot in Commerce where she plans to build a house. When Krysten goes off to college — possibly the University of Michigan to become a pediatrician — Williamson might "adopt older kids who don't have a home," she said.

"That's farfetched. I talk about it all the time. My friends think I'm nuts."

But what's nuts to the kid with the ideal personality who's had major leadership positions and \$24 million in real estate sales in her first eight years in the business?

Anti kick-back laws are spreading nationwide

REAL ESTATE QUERIES



ROBERT M. MEISNER

Q. I have a condominium in Florida, and our association has had problems with a contractor and its manager. I understand that Florida has adopted a statute in regard to "kick backs" in competitive bidding. Do you have any information about that?

A. In 1991, Florida Statute 718 (the Florida Condominium Act) was amended to deal with the issue of preventing the practice of vendors bribing officers and directors of management companies to secure available contracts. In 1994 in New York City, 92 indictments were handed down by a grand jury against various property managers and management firms performing community association management in New York City.

It is expected that the New York City experience will lead New York and many other states to introduce legislation similar to that in Florida which provide a penalty for property managers and management firms accepting any compensation in exchange for the awarding of contracts.

Q. I read a recent Real Estate Query that responded to an inquiry from a rental property owner about cheap legal services. I have represented tenants over a good part of my legal career, which gives me a good perspective of both sides of the transaction.

Landlords who have neglected to comply with various statutes governing landlord/tenant relationships have often lamented that they simply don't know the law, which implies they should be excused from knowing the law.

My response is that anyone in the business of renting residential property ought to know the laws pertaining to that business.

A. As you point out, you usually get what you pay for. There are no free lunches, and one who engages in commercial transactions such as a residential real estate property transaction should be cognizant of the legal ramifications of what they do from whatever perspective they may be positioned.

Anyone who contemplates entering into a landlord/tenant relationship or any other type of legal obligation should consult with an experienced and knowledgeable attorney who can provide the insight and avoid costly errors.

Robert M. Meisner is an Oakland County area attorney concentrating his practice in the areas of condominiums, real estate, corporate law and litigation. You are invited to submit topics that you would like to see discussed in this column, including questions about condominiums, by writing Robert M. Meisner, 30205 Telegraph Road, Suite 407, Bingham Farms MI 48025. This column provides general information and should not be construed as legal opinion.

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