

REALTOR® AE

NAR.REALTOR/RAE

FALL 2021

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THAT'S WHO WE REALTOR®

THAT'S WHO WE REALTOR®
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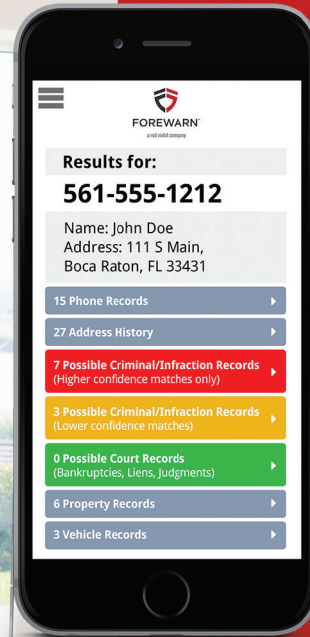
— **John Gormley**, CEO
Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS®
(Chicago area)

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Keep up the conversation by participating in AEI Year-Round.

FACEBOOK: Search for "AEI Year-Round" (private group)

WEBINAR SERIES: Visit nar.realtor/aei-year-round-virtual-sessions

More Than a Living

Greetings, AE friends!

Fall is upon us, and with this season there often comes a feeling of promise and new adventure. Maybe that's just me recalling how exciting back-to-school time can be, or knowing that I need to put away the summer clothes and break out the sweaters in anticipation of crisp fall weather. Either way, as association executives, we look to each new day and season with the optimism of doing something great.

The work we do in our communities is one of those great things. Throughout my career, one of the things that has made me most proud is how REALTOR® associations constantly strive to give back to their communities. In every town and city across the nation, AEs, REALTOR® associations, and REALTORS® are known for giving back. They contribute to the lives of people in countless ways, and the contributions they make to their communities help build and support a healthy quality of life.

This edition of REALTOR® AE magazine is dedicated to highlighting associations' community outreach. Your efforts not only make a difference in your community but also honor and promote the REALTOR® brand. And when you succeed, the entire organization can say "That's Who We R!"

"You are not here merely to make a living," President Woodrow Wilson once said. "You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand."

Sharing our successful community outreach efforts enables all of us to renew our commitment to giving back. Every AE I know has a great story to tell regarding their association's community outreach endeavors, and the nation is



ARIEL SKELLEY / THE IMAGE BANK / GETTY IMAGES

Together, we can build the spirit of hope and achievement that our country desperately needs.

better off because AEs are willing to share. Together, we can build the spirit of hope and achievement that our country desperately needs.

Just imagine if every community was lucky enough to have its local association use a National Association of REALTORS® Placemaking Grant to brighten the lives of local citizens. Imagine if every municipality was fortunate enough to have REALTORS® actively address housing shortages and

lead discussions on equity. This is not a dream that's out of reach; as individuals and as an organization, we can have a positive impact.

As you read through the community outreach initiatives shared, I encourage you to reach out to those who've contributed and to introduce those ideas to your own association leadership. Let's all ask how we can make an impact and enrich the world. Be among those who celebrate the phrase "That's Who We R" with pride, knowing that you are not here merely to make a living. ■



Janet Kane, RCE, CAE, CIPS, is CEO of MetroTex Association of REALTORS® in Dallas and chair of the Association Executives Committee.



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Governance Reimagined

“Govern forward” is the theme of the governance changes being considered in November by the National Association of REALTORS® board of directors. The proposed changes are the product of a presidential advisory group that completed a three-year mission to bring NAR governance structure, processes, people, resources, and culture in line with today’s business realities.

“NAR’s governance system had not been holistically examined since the days of black-and-white television,” says Virginia REALTORS® CEO Terrie Suit, vice chair of the Governance Game Changer PAG. “Our current decision-making structure is based on twice-a-year meetings in a world of real-time communication. This structure just doesn’t allow NAR to move at the speed of business today.”

Among the PAG’s major recommendations:

- **Eliminate the Delegate Body** and transfer its authority to a new board of directors.
- **Constitute a new board of directors** with a new authority, role, and focus to represent the full diversity of the membership, also implementing a new formula for state and local association director allocation.
- **Constitute a new Executive Committee** that’s smaller and nimbler than the board and meets at least four times a year. The Executive Committee would have authority to approve committee recommendations and policy changes, except for those that specifically require board approval.
- **Establish an enhanced role for regional vice presidents.**

- **Establish qualifications and performance expectations for all appointed leadership positions.**

“Each recommendation is intended to further one or more of the eight ideals of governance,” Suit says. “Having these ideals as the guiding light in NAR’s governance system will ensure NAR can continue to ‘govern forward’ and serve members for many years to come.”

NAR directors will vote on the recommendations at their Nov. 15 meeting. “Association executives will all be impacted,” Suit says. “AEs should be well-versed on the recommendations and make sure their members who are directors can vote knowledgeably at the November meeting.”

For more information and supplemental materials, refer to govpag.realtor or visit the GOVPAG Report community at thehub.realtor. ■

Coming Back From Hurricane Ida’s Destruction



Norman Morris



Teresa Tilton

Hurricane Ida made landfall along Louisiana’s Gulf Coast

on Aug. 29, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without power and depriving many REALTORS® of homes, offices, and other necessities. But the destruction didn’t end there: Weakened to a tropical storm, Ida dropped record amounts of rainfall on the East Coast, causing deadly, catastrophic floods.

REALTOR® associations in both areas responded quickly to help members begin the recovery process. In Louisiana, the Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes south of New Orleans were hit hardest; many areas were expected to be without power for a full month. In addition, many homes will require extensive repairs and mold remediation following the storm and flooding.

Louisiana REALTORS® partnered with NAR’s REALTORS® Relief Foundation to help families with interim financial assistance. NAR dedicated \$400,000 to Louisiana relief

efforts, and LR is adding \$1,000 to \$1,500 on top of approved awards to help recipients get back on their feet quickly.

Louisiana REALTORS® also helped deliver multiple trailer loads of essential supplies such as tarps, mops, garbage bags, and cleaning supplies to North Shore, New Orleans, and Bayou communities, and served hot meals to nearly 2,000 residents. “We coordinate with the local associations and try to be strategic,” says CEO Norman Morris.

“Every storm is different, and we try to plan ahead,” he adds. “This storm did

more destruction to infrastructure than Katrina. There are REALTORS® and members who don't have anything to go back to right now. Their structures are uninhabitable, and there are no sales. RRF dollars are critical, and we have one application, whether it's NAR or the state fund paying.

"REALTORS® are resilient, and RRF is a partnership that gets us what we need when things are bad," Morris says. "It's a team effort to get through this difficult time. We're proud to be a part of a national organization and help our members get through this."

In New Jersey, six counties were declared major disaster areas after Ida spawned tornadoes and widespread flooding. "New Jersey is no stranger to strong storms, but Tropical Storm Ida left a path of destruction most of the state had not seen since Superstorm Sandy," says Teresa M.



Record flooding in New Jersey (left) destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses, while some low-lying Bayou areas of Louisiana (right) went without power for more than a month.



Tilton, RCE, AHWD, director of professional services for New Jersey REALTORS®.

After conducting safety calls to local associations, NJR submitted an application for disaster relief assistance to RRF as well as a Voluntary Cooperative Program Agreement, winning approval for housing-related assistance. "We are so grateful for the quick and generous

support of the RRF for New Jerseyans," Tilton says.

"Let this serve as a reminder to have a disaster plan so you can act quickly and effectively," she adds. "Spread the word about the REALTORS® Relief Foundation. Ask for donations. We need to ensure that RRF can continue to respond to disasters as quickly and effectively as possible." ■

NEWS

in the spotlight

Chicago CEO Wins Prestigious ASAE Award



Michelle Mills Clement, FASAE, CAE, RCE, was named the 72nd recipient of the American Society of Association Executives Key Award in July. CEO of the Chicago Association of REALTORS®, Mills Clement has been recognized throughout the country for her work in

the real estate industry, including advocacy for fair housing and anti-racist initiatives.

As ASAE's highest honor, the Key Award is presented to chief staff executives of associations who demonstrate exceptional qualities of leadership and a deep commitment to voluntary membership organizations. Mills Clement is

the first Black recipient and the youngest in the award's 60-year history.

Mills Clement has been an ASAE Fellow and Diversity Executive Leadership Program Scholar and also serves on the board of the Chicago-based Association Forum. She is the co-founder and host of the "Texts to Table: A Conversation About Race and Leadership" webcast. ■



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AN ARTICLE CAN'T TELL YOU THE TRUE VALUE OF A HOME. I CAN.

EXPERT. NEIGHBOR. COMMUNITY LEADER.
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I CAN HELP YOU MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR MOST IMPORTANT ASSET.



'THAT'S WHO WE R' Delivers the 'Real' in REALTOR®

Associations tap into value proposition, create pride using the award-winning campaign.

BY M. DIANE MCCORMICK

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or two decades, NAR's consumer advertising campaign has raised public awareness about the REALTOR® brand. But the campaign reemerged with new energy in 2019, when NAR launched "That's Who We R."

Now in its third year, the multi-award-winning initiative has transformed into a touchstone for REALTOR® pride that reinforces the REALTOR® value proposition with consumers, highlights the iconic brand trademark, and is evolving to meet the needs of REALTOR® association executives and their members.

With the campaign's flexibility and clear messaging, associations are finding creative, impactful ways to leverage its assets on behalf of members and extend messages that raise consumer awareness of REALTORS® as trusted, professional partners in real estate transactions and beyond.

Birth of a Campaign

One job of association executives is "to spread REALTOR® awareness in the community," says Greater Chattanooga (Tenn.) REALTORS® Communications Director Josh Branum, which made That's Who We R "a home run. The whole campaign has been a great way to spread awareness that our members live in and love where they work."

For That's Who We R, creative agency Havas helped NAR deliver a foundational tagline, bold look, and clear message declaring who REALTORS® are and the value they bring. The ad campaign distinguishes REALTORS® from nonmember agents and shows how they go above and beyond, not only in the transaction, but also to better the communities in which they live and work.

The campaign has three goals, says NAR Director of Consumer Strategy & Brand Advertising Karen Bebart:

- Showcase the value of partnering with REALTORS® when buying or selling property;
- Differentiate and distinguish the REALTOR® brand; and
- Instill pride in REALTORS® when they see and hear the campaign.

Refreshed every few months, campaign assets issued for use by associations and REALTORS® include the That's Who We R tagline and logo; print, banner, and billboard ads; backgrounds for use during video calls; posters; and static and animated messages for social media. There's also free use of NAR's Photofy app, which offers personalization of a vast library of campaign social assets and easy sharing to social platforms. And there's That's Who We R merchandise, which includes lapel pins, notebooks, and apparel.

That's Who We R in the Wild

REALTOR® associations are using That's Who We R to elevate the visibility and status of their members in a variety of ways:

Supporting community. In North Carolina, Salisbury/Rowan REALTORS® includes That's Who We R banners in its emails to members. The #ThatsWhoWeR hashtag goes in social media posts about the association's community efforts, including an annual golf tournament that supports the local school system's Yum Yum Bus summer meal program.

"We want to keep everybody aware that we're here," says CEO Carla Rose. "We may be small, but we can do big things." That's Who We R may be a campaign for REALTORS®, "but it's about bringing the community together," she says.

When Salisbury/Rowan REALTORS® overhauled and streamlined its strategic plan, the That's Who We R banner anchored a summary of the plan and its member-driven, community-focused direction. "We have made it a part of not just the public side, but used it internally, as well," Rose says.

Feeding families. The rapidly growing Des Moines (Iowa) Area Association of REALTORS® embraced the campaign in late 2019, buying billboards and encouraging members to use campaign assets, says CEO Cindy Pelz.

When the pandemic arrived, DMAAR's board donated \$64,000 of its own funds to local food banks and Iowa Children and Family Services. "There were children out there going hungry," says Pelz.



PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® posts That's Who We R billboards in advance of state meetings.

DMAAR sent \$1,000 checks to members, who presented them to their local pantries while speaking from a That's Who We R script. Members "were just tickled pink," Pelz says. "Getting involved in your community is the best advertisement anyone could ever have." DMAAR later compiled the presentation photos into a video—also a big hit with members, who shared it to build their own brands.

"I constantly have members telling me that someone came up to them in the grocery store and said they saw them online and asked, 'Are you a National Association of REALTORS® member? Is that why you got that R?'" Pelz says.

Building visibility. Every other year over two consecutive weekends, Greater Chattanooga REALTORS® sponsors a build of a Habitat for Humanity home. The event photographs well, and in 2019, participants "completely bought in" when the association suggested they wear That's Who We R T-shirts.

Branum turned clips and photos from the build into a video where the shirts were as much a star as the home itself, creating passive awareness of the community-mindedness of REALTORS®. "Let the association do the bragging for you," Branum tells his members.

"When our members see that they are volunteering as a group and not just as a single individual, they realize how much they are raising the profile of REALTORS® everywhere, and the community notices," he says.

Harnessing passion. The Greater Harrisburg (Pa.) Association of REALTORS® channels That's Who We R through its foundation, the nonprofit arm that sponsors such outreach as Thanksgiving food drives and back-to-school backpack campaigns.

"The majority of REALTORS® are very passionate about giving back to the community they serve," says GHAR CEO Kathleen Ludwig. "NAR really highlights and instills that as part of being a REALTOR®."

GHAR Director of Member Engagement and Communications Stephanie Mount uses #ThatsWhoWeR in all GHAR Instagram posts, also attaching the hashtag and tagline to the foundation's promotional videos and event coverage.



GREATER CHATTANOOGA REALTORS®

Greater Chattanooga REALTORS® spends two weekends each year participating in a Habitat for Humanity build in That's Who We R T-shirts.

GHAR also hangs posters from the ad campaign in the classrooms where current and future REALTORS® get their prelicensing or continuing education for "subtle branding," Ludwig says. "It's about starting off the mindset early in their career and continuing throughout their entire career as a REALTOR®."

Spreading the word. At Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS®, That's Who We R supports an internal goal of reaching consumers and members "to reinforce identity and pride of being a REALTOR®," says CEO Michael McGee.

Advertising campaigns are timed to accompany governance meetings held in the state capital of Harrisburg in January, June, and September. Strategically placed billboards from the campaign assets share the That's Who We R tagline with motorists driving the region's busiest corridors.

"That gave us an opportunity to catch not only consumers who were driving by, but also our members who were coming into town, as well as our state elected officials and members of the governor's administration," McGee says. "It was our way to say, 'Our people are in town.' We have a strong reputation in the state capital, so we thought it was a good opportunity to amplify the NAR message. And our members appreciated seeing the REALTOR® brand on display, showcasing PAR's advocacy and reminding consumers of the benefits of using a REALTOR®."

Leveraging the larger campaign. Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® benefits from NAR's media buys in the Washington, D.C., market, but the association's public relations firm is also exploring ways to partner with NAR to leverage and reinforce the national message. NVAR also makes strategic use of the #ThatsWhoWeR hashtag in D.C.-area communities.

"We want to be smart about it," says Vice President of Communications Ann Gutkin, to avoid diluting the message. "We try not to post the hashtag on everything we do, but tailor it so it really is reinforcing the message."

When NVAR adapted its traditional single-day annual conference to a three-week virtual format in 2020, the first week was



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themed “That’s Who We R Week.” Committees and advisory groups created content and sessions focusing on key topics including fair housing and volunteering.

The entrance to the Digital Experience Center at NVAR’s headquarters—where members can test new software and tools—is emblazoned with the “That’s Who We R” slogan. “That’s tying the campaign into digital advancement and reinforcing professionalism through the adoption of new technology that can benefit consumers,” Gutkin says.

Sharing Professionalism With the Public

Telling “the broader story of the REALTOR® brand,” as Bebart puts it, includes educating consumers about the ethics and expertise that ideally lead consumers to select real estate agents who are REALTORS®.

In 2020, when NAR began intensifying its advocacy for fair housing through the ACT (accountability, culture change, and training) initiative, That’s Who We R provided a natural extension, letting consumers know via ads and video content—some of the most widely shared ever—the ethical behavior expected of REALTORS®.

“We had already underscored the Code of Ethics, and it was only natural to go further and show that the REALTOR® brand stands for fair housing for all and treating everybody equally,” Bebart says. “In fact, our code mandates that. We know it, but consumers didn’t, and now more than ever, consumers are seeking brands that don’t just say they are ethical but can prove it.”

While community involvement remains an important aspect of the campaign, NVAR plans to continue to leverage the professionalism side of the messaging. “We are trying to get that professionalism message out there,” says Gutkin. “That’s a key differentiator between a REALTOR® and a licensed agent.”

Taking Ownership

The visibility of the billboards the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® places alongside freeways “gets our members excited,” McGee says. “Our members love what they do, and visually reinforcing it for them is something they appreciate.”

NAR believes so strongly in the campaign that it has submitted the work for major awards, winning multiple recognitions for the campaign’s 2020 fair housing work, its video series partnerships with Vice and Great Big Story, and *The Battle Home* exhibition staged in Kansas City’s Union Station. “These awards validate that the work is strong, and it holds up against the campaigns of other major brands,” says Bebart.

“We are constantly evaluating, tweaking, and testing the work,” she adds. “As stewards of the brand and the assessment that finances the campaign, the team regularly gauges analytics



That’s Who We R offers multiple assets for use by members and AEs.

across all channels, including social, digital, television, and search. Insights gleaned can shift language, design, and placements to optimize outputs and fine-tune the target audiences.

“With the help and support of the Consumer Communications Committee, we make sure the campaign authentically represents REALTORS® to ensure consumers continue to differentiate and value the REALTOR® brand,” Bebart says.

Rose, from Salisbury/Rowan REALTORS®, sees the national commercials and thinks, “That’s us.” It incentivizes association executives to work the message into outreach for “that constant reminder,” she says. “It’s not in your face all the time, but it’s that gentle nudge. It’s a reminder to everybody—including ourselves—[that we hold] ourselves to that higher standard and that we’re more than just real estate professionals. We are REALTORS®.” ■



M. Diane McCormick is a Pennsylvania-based freelance writer and author.

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PILLARS

of the Community



REALTORS® get involved in their communities throughout the year, donating time, goods, and expertise.

Association executives offer 12 ideas for connecting your members with consumers and the community at large.

COMPILED BY IAN P. MURPHY

It's easier to advocate for the real estate industry when your members are known as professionals who contribute to the betterment of the community on an ongoing basis.

REALTOR® AE asked association executives how they're working to support the REALTOR® brand through consumer outreach. AEs responded with a variety of ways to help members get involved in service initiatives, advance knowledge of public policy, and educate consumers on the ins and outs of homeownership.



Persistence pays. After months of trying to find an organization that would allow volunteers to participate in person, members of the Harlingen (Texas) Board of REALTORS® donated two days of their time in July to the Vintage on Jackson Thrift Store. REALTORS® helped sort donations, organized merchandise, and did some light cleaning. All profits from the two days went toward funding the Sunny Glen Children's Home, a nonprofit that houses abused and neglected children.

"In the past, we had organized donation drives, but rarely do we get to see where those items end up," AE Ana Becerra says. "Once there, we learned that the lofts above the retail location offer independent living facilities to young adults who have aged out of foster care. We were happy to lend a helping hand to an organization that helps so much with our local youths, and the feedback from members was positive."



Use the power of persuasion. In January, the REALTOR® Association of Prince William in Woodbridge, Va., launched a project to "Elevate, Energize, and Expand" the association's advocacy program. The effort harnessed the persuasive power of a group of the association's past presidents to increase awareness of advocacy efforts and improve relationships with elected officials at the local, state, and national levels.

Despite pandemic restrictions, the "Triple E" team dramatically increased REALTORS® Political Action Committee investments, received a proclamation from the county government recognizing Fair Housing Month, worked with the state association on General Assembly elections, and launched a federal call to action in conjunction with national and state association partners. "We reached these goals, thanks to the determination, drive, and diligence of our members," says CEO April Thomas, RCE, AHWD.



Be a hometown hero. In Pennsylvania, the Reading-Berks Association of REALTORS® Young Professionals Network partnered with Reading Public Works to spearhead a superhero-themed park cleanup event in May. REALTORS® dressed as their favorite superheroes for the cleanup and participated in a superhero-themed photoshoot that helped publicize the event on social media and in the local news.

Beyond giving back, the event emphasized the value of REALTORS® as important community resources and encouraged local youth to help care for public spaces. "We plan to do this

again at different public park locations in our communities,” says AE Brittny Baker Shurr.

Getting other organizations involved can magnify an event’s impact while easing the “lift” required of the REALTOR® association, she says: “Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Start small, but execute the initiative well. Pooling resources with local nonprofit organizations and government entities is valuable. Also, encourage your affiliate members to take part.”



Find a need to fill. To underline its “Member Driven, Community Focused” motto, Bonita Springs-Estero (Florida) REALTORS®

asks its leadership academy to create a community service project each year. One successful initiative was a meal-packing event that attracted hundreds of volunteers. “We received front-page recognition in the local paper,” says CEO Meighan Harris, RCE. “I would say that was a win for the REALTORS®.”

This year, the leadership academy is leading an event to educate the public about the importance of keeping the region’s waterways clean, featuring a walk for clean water, trash cleanup via kayak, live music, art vendors, and education from local environmental organizations.

Other association activities include a “Blessings in a Basket” charity drive to support St. Vincent DePaul CARES, an organization that helps get homeless residents into temporary housing. “As association executives, part of your role should be to engage with local organizations,” Harris says. “This allows members to find out more about what nonprofits are doing for the community, what their needs are, and how our members can volunteer or give.”



Keep citizens safe. Cognizant of the fact that dozens of drownings happen each year on Lake Michigan, the Community Outreach Committee of the West Michigan Lakeshore Association of REALTORS® in Grand Haven launched a drive to donate 375 life jackets to sheriff’s offices in Ottawa, Muskegon, and Allegan counties this summer.

The initiative made the evening news, and Ottawa County Sheriff Steve Kempker told the *Holland Sentinel* that it was the largest water safety donation drive he’d ever seen. “We can’t say

thanks enough,” he said. “Each of these jackets has the potential of saving a life.”



Put out fires. Summit REALTORS® in Dillon, Colo., connects with the community every year to promote wildfire education and prevention, sending homeowners a mailer in preparation for the wildfire season in Summit, Park, and Lake counties. The mailer stresses the importance of “defensible space”—the fire-resistant buffer zone between property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or forest surrounding it—and its impact on property insurance.

Summit REALTORS® partners with the Colorado Association of REALTORS®, American Family Insurance, State Farm, and other organizations to offer Defensible Space Grants to homeowners who can’t afford to create defensible space on their property. The grant pays for tree removal to meet guidelines as defined by local fire department evaluations.

In June, Summit also raised \$19,000 for the Neighboring Communities Ravaged by Wildfires campaign to aid residents displaced by the October 2020 East Troublesome Fire. “Sometimes, making that first connection to the community is as simple as picking up the

phone,” says Executive Director Sarah Thorsteinson, RCE. “I called local fire departments nine years ago to start a partnership for our homeowner wildfire education efforts, and it resulted in an important relationship.”



Show support. The REALTOR® Association of Pioneer Valley in Springfield, Mass., tapped REALTOR® Party resources to produce mailers in support of a REALTOR® champion running for mayor. “REALTORS® are trusted community resources,” says CEO Brendan Bailey, RCE, CIPS. “When we have an opportunity to help educate the public on the benefits of a candidate, it’s important that we do so.”

Using grants from NAR and the Massachusetts Association of REALTORS®, RAPV funded a series of digital ads, two direct-mail pieces, and a webpage with the “homeownership matters” message, encouraging the public to engage with housing-related issues and legislative activity. “We were able to



It’s OK—heck, it’s encouraged—to steal great ideas and use them in your own backyard.”

—Brendan Bailey, CEO of the REALTOR® Association of Pioneer Valley, Springfield, Mass.

show that the REALTORS® advocate not just for business interests but also for the protection and betterment of the Pioneer Valley,” Bailey says. His advice? “Utilize the tools that are right there waiting through your state association and NAR.”



Put a face to the name. In addition to engaging consumers on housing-related issues, RAPV invites members to appear in paid interview segments that appear twice a month during the local ABC affiliate’s daytime news programming. Speakers are usually sourced from the association’s board and discuss topics such as the differences between REALTORS® and licensed real estate agents, prepping a house for the season or for sale, and pandemic relief resources available to homeowners, renters, and landlords.

To develop ideas for outreach, “talk to your colleagues,” Bailey says. “Put yourself out there and ask for help and ideas. It’s OK—heck, it’s encouraged—to steal great ideas and use them in your own backyard.”



Educate employees. To help area businesses find and retain employees, the Central Panhandle Association of REALTORS® in Panama City, Fla., recently launched an Employer-Assisted Housing program. The program focuses on four areas to help workers create a plan to become a homeowner: homebuyer education, credit guidance, financial assistance, and optional employer benefits.

CPAR created a training program and toolkit for members to become EAH-certified, while a consumer-facing webpage educates local businesses and helps them find REALTORS® who are EAH-certified. Partnering with the local Economic Development Alliance and Chambers of Commerce, CPAR spread the word using a series of presentations and advertisements.

To help such an effort succeed, “get REALTORS® onboard with the program as early as possible,” says CEO Debbie Ashbrook. “Involve the local news media to get the word out. We issued press releases ahead of each of our speaking engagements to ensure good coverage. This exposure made our REALTORS® want to get involved.”



Keep the community safe. The Vermont Association of REALTORS® recently staged a “Home Safe Home” event in the parking lot of a local shopping center. The event offered free document shredding and radon tests, education on fire extinguishers and water safety, a pest control expert, and a home inspector, plus free Ben & Jerry’s ice cream. “The fire truck and rescue truck were big hits with the

Meeting the Standard

NAR’s Core Standards include the following consumer outreach standard: “Every association will demonstrate engagement in at least four meaningful consumer engagement activities annually, including at least two activities demonstrating how the association is the ‘Voice for Real Estate’ in its market, and at least two activities demonstrating the association’s involvement and/or investment in the community.” Learn more at nar.realtor/corestandards.

kids,” says AE Sara Galotti Waskuch. “We got lots of positive feedback and will definitely do this again.”



Facilitate donations. The Fargo-Moorhead Association of REALTORS® in Fargo, N.D., partners with a local radio station every year to sponsor an event to attract donations of gently used clothing and household items to a local charity. REALTOR® members work alongside community volunteers to unload vehicles and “Stuff the Truck” full of donations. “Members enjoy meeting the public when they drop off donations as well as working with other community volunteers,” CEO Marti Kaiser says.



Promote small businesses. The Mid Carolina Regional Association of REALTORS® in Southern Pines, N.C., recently held a six-month small business promotion through its consumer outreach committee, featuring three local businesses per month. The association encouraged members and the general public to shop, dine, and otherwise patronize the featured businesses during the pandemic. Customers of each participating business were eligible for a drawing, with a \$100 gift card from the business—funded by MCAR—as the prize. “Some of the businesses saw such an uptick in customers that they continued the promotion on their own after their featured month,” says CEO Sandra Dukes Barnhardt. ■



Ian P. Murphy is senior editor of REALTOR® AE.



DISASTER!

WHAT I LEARNED

Preparedness and resolute effort helped the Ozark Gateway Association of REALTORS® and the city of Joplin, Mo., recover from massive destruction.

BY KIM COX

Neighborhoods were in ruins following the 2011 tornado.

Ten years later, many of those same neighborhoods have been rebuilt.

O

n Sunday, May 22, 2011, at 5:41 p.m., a powerful tornado ripped through Joplin, Mo. (population 50,000), killing 161 people and destroying more than 8,000 homes and buildings. Kim Cox, GRI, CEO of the Ozark Gateway Association of REALTORS®, recalls how REALTORS® managed through the chaos. Her experience provides an object lesson in how associations can help their members and their communities in the aftermath of disaster.

When you're an association executive who's concerned about the lives and livelihoods of your members, there's no time to waste after a disaster. Immediately after the EF-5 tornado hit Joplin, we had no phone service, power, or water. My husband and I raced around the city in the pouring rain, searching for family members. After confirming that my family was safe but that our daughter had lost her roof, it was time to reach out to our work families.

Two of my staff members' homes were destroyed, and it would be a day and a half before I found out they survived. Our MLS director and I met at the association office and pulled a list of all our REALTOR® and affiliate members from the board safe. We found a landline that worked and started calling the designated REALTORS® of every office. We knew the DRs would have already been checking on their agents' whereabouts and safety, and this could significantly accelerate our own effort.

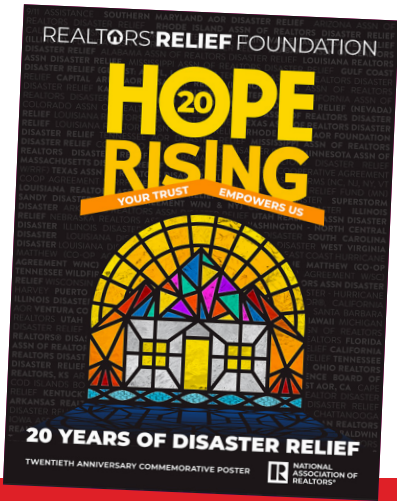
After 24 hours, we had our first statistics: More than 30 of our 491 members were missing, more than 20 had lost their homes, two offices had been totaled, and several dozen members had lost their vehicles. We also had a list of immediate needs: tourniquets, bandages, and transportation to loved ones' homes, hospitals, and damaged sites to retrieve any personal belongings that could be saved.

In the early days, the hazards multiplied. Many utilities were still on, and the smell of natural gas was everywhere. Downed power lines posed extreme danger, and we had to be cautious about where we parked our cars to ensure emergency vehicles could get around. We were in a state of hyperawareness. After almost two weeks, we had an accurate picture: 43 members had lost their homes, more than 80 had lost their vehicles, five had lost their offices, one had lost his life, four had lost immediate family, and 14 were still missing. It would take several weeks to determine that all 14 were alive, though some were injured.

We started to track who needed what and who was available to help. Then, we began to help members with everything from meal

delivery to laundry to running folks to and from doctor's appointments. We checked with members every week for the next four months. Our office became ground zero, where members could use phones, computers, printers—whatever they needed.

Our members were not only dealing with their own losses; they also had to help their clients recoup as well. With so many citizens displaced, housing represented the most dire need. The MLS showed 1,200 residential listings available, but we needed to quickly assess whether listed properties were destroyed, damaged, or still available to sell. More than 3,000 real estate transactions closed in just over two months—unheard of for our area.



Paying It Forward, and Backward

The National Association of REALTORS® is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the REALTORS® Relief Foundation this year with the Hope Rising fundraising campaign. Thanks to generous state and local associations, companies, and individual supporters, as of mid-September, RRF was at 84% of its \$8.5 million goal.

RRF is dedicated to meeting residents' short-term housing needs after a disaster. The foundation awarded \$175,000 to Missouri REALTORS® to help victims of the 2011 tornado. After distributing \$93,000 of the grant money to affected residents, Missouri REALTORS® recognized that the state had more resources than it needed and voted to return the entire \$175,000 in September 2011 so that the money could be used in areas of greater need.

One hundred percent of the money donated to RRF goes to disaster victims. You and your members can contribute and read the disclaimer at nar.realtor/rrf.

We reached out immediately to our lockbox vendor, Sentrilock, and let them know that the first count indicated that we'd lost more than 200 lockboxes in the tornado. They suspended our monthly fees and shipped 200 replacement lockboxes without hesitation. Our MLS vendor at the time, CoreLogic, helped us set up programming in the MLS to include the tornado zone itself so we could easily identify properties that were affected in any way. We were absolutely overwhelmed with gratitude.

Our REALTOR® family across the state and nation pitched in to help with recovery, and we became a distribution center for donated goods. We received more than 9,000 pairs of new socks from a member of the Kansas City Association of REALTORS® and 5,000 pairs of shoes from the Columbia Board of REALTORS®. We also received totes members could use to salvage their belongings, tarps for damaged roofs, tools, buckets, soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, cleaning supplies, clothes, bedding, towels, and more.

Help came from the Greater Springfield Board of REALTORS®, the Bagnell Dam Association of REALTORS®, the Jefferson City Area Board of REALTORS®, the St. Louis REALTORS®, the St. Charles County (Mo.) Association of REALTORS®, and other associations. In the end, we received more than seven semitrailer loads of donated items. Every time a load came in, we'd alert our members; once their needs were met, we'd open to the public. Even though the contributions were generated by a disaster, I felt I was seeing the essence of humanity.

The City of Joplin reached out to business leaders about serving on a newly formed committee, the Citizens Advisory Recovery Team (CART). There were two co-chairs for each sector: economic development, infrastructure and environment, schools and community facilities, and housing and neighborhoods. I served as the co-chair of the housing and neighborhoods sector for several years.

Getting neighborhoods rebuilt takes a long time. We met each week with representatives from various organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Missouri Housing Development Commission, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the state insurance commission, Habitat for Humanity, and the homebuilders association, as well as individual developers, builders, and real estate brokers. We housed displaced residents, got people's insurance and legal questions answered, and eventually presented the city council with a recommendation on feasible projects and available resources.

Joplin was smart to create CART. I hope you never find yourself in the situation we were in 2011, but if you do, a recovery group like CART is essential. Today—10 years after the tornado—our REALTOR® association is stronger than ever, with more than 700 members in the MLS. Federal, state, and local entities provided Joplin with more than \$321 million for cleanup and rebuilding

7 Steps to Plan Ahead

Want to take an active role in ensuring your association and community are prepared for disaster? Kim Cox offers these tips for local AEs:

- Keep a hard copy of members' complete contact information in a physical safe for quick reference. In a disaster, there is often no power to access computers, the internet, or even phones.
- Create a document that provides guidance to members and their clients in times of crisis. For example, encourage local residents to check their insurance coverage annually to ensure that the contents of their home, not just the structure, are covered. Renters should obtain insurance, too, even if it's not required by their housing provider. Ask an insurance agent what will protect them best against catastrophic damage and potential legal liabilities.
- Develop a relationship with your state association attorneys. Missouri REALTORS® attorneys helped us revamp our forms quickly to include specific language about the tornado and the properties themselves.
- Consider working with an attorney to set up your own relief foundation. Donations come in quickly, and many contributors will want to take a tax deduction.
- Be aware of the relief funds available through your state association and other sources.
- Help your community preselect a recovery group (like Joplin's CART) that includes local leaders in business, government, schools, and utilities.
- Identify a radio station or website that can serve as an authoritative source of information on people's well-being, insurance, charging stations, pharmacies, hospitals, sleeping facilities, sources of donated clothing, and other resources.

efforts, and its population has grown slightly. As for the housing stock here, Joplin has seen an average of five new homes built per week since the tornado, with more than 2,500 new, single-family home permits to date—a major accomplishment. ■



Kim Cox, GRI, is CEO of Ozark Gateway Association of REALTORS® in Joplin, Mo.



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Medical Mandate

You may ask employees to get vaccinated and disclose their vaccination status.

As more employees return to the office, employers—associations included—are grappling with how to best provide a safe work environment. Two major considerations are whether to adopt a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy and whether to require employees to disclose their vaccination status. There are no easy answers, and associations must determine what makes the most sense for them based on their organization's circumstances and workforce.

Recently, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued guidance making it clear that employers can mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for employees, with two exceptions: as a reasonable accommodation to employees unable to be vaccinated due to a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and in the case of a sincerely held religious belief or practice under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Therefore, before enacting a vaccine mandate, an association must be properly prepared not only to enforce the policy but also to handle employee requests for an exception to the policy. The association must also be prepared to discipline or terminate employees who simply refuse to comply. Alternatively, some associations may choose to adjust their remote work policies or encourage vaccination by offering incentives to vaccinate or providing more education about COVID-19 and vaccinations.

Documenting Accommodation

If you enact a vaccination mandate, be sure to engage in an interactive process as soon as you learn that an employee needs an accommodation. The process should

be a good-faith effort to learn about the employee's circumstances and the accommodation needed. An employer is allowed to evaluate the legitimacy of the medical issue or the sincerity of the religious belief or practice. However, it is generally recommended to presume these requests to be legitimate or sincere unless there is an objective basis to question them.

An employee may be required to provide a description of the circumstance and supporting documentation. Employers want to ensure that they're asking only for information that would be considered reasonably necessary for the circumstance's evaluation. It's also important to note that a sincerely held religious belief can be theistic, moral, and/or ethical—as long as it is sincerely held, it should be considered valid.

Be sure to protect and keep confidential any information you collect through the process, particularly health and medical information that you are required to keep separate from the employee's personnel file to protect its confidentiality. An accommodation request may be denied if it will cause an undue hardship or pose a direct threat, but it would be prudent to consult with local counsel before issuing a denial.

Disclosure of Status

Regardless of whether a vaccination mandate policy has been implemented, an employer may ask employees to disclose their vaccination status. This information can help with reentry plans and determining what health and safety measures to institute. However, the scope of the inquiry should be narrow to avoid eliciting an employee's medical or disability-related information. Proof of vaccination status—a copy of the employee's vaccine

card or other documentation—should be sufficient. Again, vaccination status information should be kept confidential and shared only on a need-to-know basis.

Once the association determines its policies for returning to work, establish clear and consistent communication with employees. As the pandemic continues to evolve, keep employees informed about the association's policies and procedures and everything you are doing to protect health and safety.

See nar.realtor/covid-19-workplace-re-entry-checklist and eoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws for the latest guidelines.

Note that some states and local governments have imposed vaccination mandates. Know your state and local laws and work with counsel to ensure compliance. In addition, on Sept. 9, President Joe Biden announced that employers with 100 or more employees will be required to ensure that their workers are either fully vaccinated or required to produce a negative COVID-19 test each week. The mandate will be implemented through an emergency temporary standard issued by the Department of Labor and its Occupational Safety and Health Administration, but questions remain about when the mandate will become effective and how it will apply to employers and their workforce. NAR is closely monitoring the situation and will provide any updates as they become available. ■



Charlie Lee is senior counsel and director of legal affairs for NAR.



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Defining the Terms

NAR resources can help local and state associations seeking to influence legislative proposals affecting short-term rental properties.

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic rise in short-term rental activity. More small investors are buying second homes not just to escape to a vacation destination or live in a less-populated area, but to make money. And with that boom has come an increase in government efforts to control the short-term rental market.

NAR's Resort and Second Home Committee held a webinar in July to discuss recent trends in regulations affecting short-term rentals to educate local, state, and regional REALTOR® associations on the issues and help them advocate for equitable solutions that satisfy residents while preserving rental property rights.

New Restrictions

Regulatory proposals have traditionally taken the form of tax policy and zoning ordinances, panelists said. New ordinances often cite the preservation of neighborhood character and/or seek to recover tax revenue, and most states now have a lodging or sales tax that applies to short-term rentals. "Typically, it starts with a registration, license, or permitting requirement," said Tim Twardowski, partner in the Boston office of Robinson+Cole, NAR's consultant on land use policy and regulation.

With the rapid expansion in short-term rentals in well-touristed locations such as Hawaii and Florida, short-term rental ownership has produced such a drain on the properties available to buy and live in that housing inventory and affordability have plummeted. As a result, some areas have "overcorrected" in an effort to control the market, panelists said.

New proposals tend to seek to limit the number of short-term rentals allowed in specific neighborhoods or the number of days per year a short-term rental can be offered.

"This is the biggest hammer local governments have," said Tom Martinelli, Southeast public policy director for Airbnb. "If they can restrict the where and the how often [or] eliminate the inventory and the amount of days, that is a huge problem for us."

In the last few years, Robinson+Cole has also seen proposals emerge in larger cities seeking to prohibit short-term rentals in properties that aren't also owner-occupied. The goal: protecting the city's residential housing supply. "It's something we'll need to keep an eye on going forward," Twardowski said.

NAR Resources

NAR offers robust resources, including access to NAR's Land Use Initiative. Powered by Robinson+Cole, it is a premier program available to all state and local REALTOR® associations for analyzing land-use issues.

Association executives can submit a proposed ordinance or other legislation to the LUI for review. Robinson+Cole then analyzes the proposal and generates talking points about the issue, what the proposal is trying to accomplish, and what impact it might have on the real estate industry.

In one situation, a popular resort area of South Carolina was working on an ordinance covering short-term rental usage that "turned into an outright ban in one meeting," said Reah Smith, an agent with Lake Keowee Real Estate in Seneca, S.C., and a member of NAR's Resort and Second Home Committee. She submitted a request to the LUI and received a memo outlining the areas of the proposal REALTORS® found problematic. Local and state association staff can search by keyword, issue, date, and state to read proposed measures submitted over

the last 22 years at realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/land-use.

"It gave me great talking points to be able to stand up at the city council meeting and discuss what the full impact of that ordinance would be," Smith said. "If you end up in one of these scenarios and think, 'I'm up against a wall,' they're ready to support you."

NAR is now updating a series of white papers on short-term rentals to reflect current market conditions. REALTOR® associations can also turn to NAR's issues Mobilization Grant program to assist with issue polling and mobilization for or against a proposal circulating in a community. Grants can assist with email campaigns, phone banking, text messaging, and other organizing efforts.

Using an Issues Mobilization Grant, the Delaware Association of REALTORS® recently staged an action campaign that lobbied state and local elected officials to reduce proposed limits on short-term rentals during the summer months.

There were 47.2 million short-term rental units in the U.S. in 2018, and the number is growing. "We've gone through negotiations in a majority of markets," Martinelli said. "We are working with governments—not just responding to government regulations—to get rules in place that are favorable for all stakeholders."

Text STR to 30644 to receive resources on short-term rental issues via REALTOR® Party Mobile Alerts. ■



Ian P. Murphy is senior editor of REALTOR® AE magazine.

Telling Tales

How to handle matters when an employee becomes a critic.

“My direct report went over my head to the association president and complained about me. How should I handle this?”

If I had a nickel for every time I heard this question ... I wouldn't be rich, but I'd certainly be able to buy a mocha latte.

Association executives usually find out about these situations when the association president informs them. Often, the president will tell you what the employee complained about, but not always; you may need to do a little digging. Was there a claim of discrimination or another legal issue? If so, the staffer likely followed the appropriate protocol in the employee handbook. If that's the reason, you'll need to wait while the matter is investigated and cooperate fully in the investigation.

If that isn't the reason, you'll need to understand what the employee is alleging. Ask the president or whomever the employee complained to about the nature of the complaint. Help that person understand, in a polite and diplomatic manner, the process outlined in your employee handbook and anything outlined in a position description or employment agreement. Be careful not to come on too strong. Don't make things personal; stick to the business issue at hand.

In such situations, it's not uncommon for the president to respond in a reactionary manner: “I received a complaint about our AE. Something is dreadfully wrong.” Remember that volunteer leaders are REALTORS® with many great skills, but they may have little experience to draw upon in these matters and may be uncomfortable addressing them.

It's part of your job as AE to help them understand that employees can have their own issues. Maybe they aren't getting their

This is not the time to be overly assertive but rather a time for diplomacy.

needs met. They may not feel appreciated or valued. Your critic might be an underperformer lashing out against a performance improvement plan or a person who thinks he or she can do things better than you. Whatever the case, you'll need to have the president and any other members who have become involved understand your position.

Addressing the Issue

This is not the time to be overly assertive with respect to your authority but rather a time for diplomacy. Once the president and other parties have heard your side of the story, address the matter with the employee. The employee may become overly assertive, so you will need to be the calm one with the professional, executive demeanor.

Let the employee know you need to talk and want to see him or her in your office. When you start the meeting, you can begin by saying, “I'm a little confused. I understand there's something we need to discuss. Our president told me you made a complaint. As you can imagine, I'm greatly disappointed you didn't allow me the opportunity to address your complaint first. How can I help you?”

Understand that the employee likely feels he or she has one-upped you and may feel powerful in this situation. Introduce the subject and wait for the employee to state the issue. It's OK to have silence. If the silence persists for some time, provide another

opportunity to state the complaint: “I can't help you if I don't know what the problem is.”

If the employee refuses to state the issue, then you can say, “Since you aren't forthcoming with the problem, I'll assume by your silence that the problem has been resolved, and I'll let the president know.” Follow up this meeting with an email confirming what transpired. Stick to the facts in the email.

Alternatively, the employee's motives may have been innocent, and he or she may be cooperative. In your response, stick to association policy and procedures. Remind the employee of the policy. Use empathetic statements such as, “I hear what you're saying. Help me understand how you arrived at that conclusion.” Or, “It's unfortunate you didn't feel comfortable approaching me. Do we need to talk about that?”

Once the matter has been settled, let the president know what has transpired. Note that you wouldn't normally discuss such a situation, but under the circumstances, you wanted to keep volunteer leadership informed. This assures your president that the matter has been handled appropriately. Shake the dust off your feet and move forward.

Do you have an HR question? Send it to Carole Kaptur confidentially at ckaptur@nar.realtor. ■



Carole Kaptur, GRI, C2EX, is a consultant in NAR's Strategic Association Management Services, Talent Development, and Resources group. She holds the Senior Certified Professional designation from the Society for Human Resource Management and the Human Capital Strategist certification from HRD Future.

Joining Forces

Engineering a merger between two large MLSs wasn't easy but has paid off.

The Hudson Gateway Association of REALTORS® formed OneKey MLS with the Long Island Board of REALTORS® in 2018, merging their systems to provide a central listing service for the entire New York metro area. Since then, OneKey MLS has grown steadily to offer consumers and REALTORS® in 11 counties a variety of useful tools to facilitate real estate transactions.

REALTOR® AE recently spoke with OneKey CEO Jim Speer, pictured right, about the ins and outs of a merger that made it one of the largest and most comprehensive listing services in the nation.

Q: For association executives and MLS executives involved in or thinking about consolidation, what were the most important considerations before and during the merger?

Speer: Four major considerations took precedence when we began. First, all parties were encouraged to come to the table without expectations to engage in an open-minded conversation. We discussed our values and found commonality in our philosophies, but also differences. We asked a skilled consultant to facilitate consolidation, and they helped move us closer to a signed agreement.

Second, we dealt with the technical considerations surrounding the fact that both MLSs wanted to avoid disruptions and create functional continuity for subscribers and participants. The need to create a consumer-facing website that synchronizes data from the MLS systems was paramount.

Third, a unified policy of rules, regulations, and procedures was needed before



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merging. Tedious line-by-line examinations ensued. Once decisions were made, a consolidated rulebook emerged. To accomplish this required compromises from both sides.

Finally, the best way to educate and prepare more than 40,000 REALTORS®

for upcoming policy changes was a major consideration. We produced instructional videos, hosted webinars, created and shared informational bulletins, and established a nonbranded, generic microsite—newsmlsinfo.com—as a communication channel for REALTORS® to access prior to the merger, in addition to their existing informational channels.

Q: How has OneKey MLS helped you “up the game” in terms of building confidence with consumers regarding data integrity?

Speer: With our consumer site, we pride ourselves on supplying the most up-to-date and accurate information available—data that comes from the source. Consumers trust the MLS, and we continue to strengthen its reliable foundation.

Q: How are you addressing data integrity and accuracy to maintain your standing in the real estate industry?

Speer: We performed a tremendous amount of testing when translating and normalizing data between the two MLS systems to ensure that the data feed remained entirely trustworthy. Development of the software needed to accommodate the merger took more than a year. We performed extensive quality assurance at every step. Adhering to these practices streamlined the process of development, ensuring quality within the build, rather than post-development.

Q: In choosing to maintain two MLS systems, how are

you prioritizing technological progress and innovation?

Speer: Providing the very best service to REALTORS® is our primary focus, and maintaining two systems is currently best for them. Stratus, the vendor used in the Long Island market, made many changes, so those subscribers had to learn a good amount.

OneKey MLS staff and vendors shoulder the technical challenges of combining and maintaining data from two systems into a single, RESO-certified OneKey MLS data feed. Translating and sharing the data for consumption between systems so that it is equally accessible to all subscribers, within a nationally recognized standard dictionary for portals, internet data exchange sites, and back-office systems, is the highest priority in service to our REALTORS®.

Q: What apps or features can you now provide to REALTORS® or consumers that weren't available before the merger?

Speer: Since consolidation, OneKey MLS is able to offer HGAR and LIBOR members products like Remine Pro, RatePlug, and our own website templates, which are developed in-house and individually personalized to members' needs.

We recognize how critical lead generation is for REALTORS®, so we've built a beautiful, innovative, mobile-responsive, consumer-facing website for the New York metro area. The site provides a database of home listings that anyone can search. It generates thousands of monthly leads for REALTORS® and aids in their success.

Q: How does OneKey MLS provide enhanced value for REALTORS®

working in commercial real estate?

Speer: Our value for REALTORS® in commercial real estate comes primarily by virtue of our size and scale following the merger. With regional coverage throughout the New York metro area including Manhattan, members of LIBOR and HGAR working in the commercial market have access to a network of more than 45,000 REALTORS® and counting, covering 4,600 square miles.

Add this benefit to the increased exposure of commercial listings on the consumer site—50,000 page views in July 2021 alone—and the advantage is enormous. These professionals now have more opportunities, more exposure, and more options than ever before. More is more for REALTORS® working in residential and commercial real estate. ■



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Right-Sizing Sustainability

Adopting best practices can help small associations save money and expand their influence in the community.

The word “sustainability” gets tossed around a lot these days, sometimes with ambitions of preserving community character or saving the Earth. As a result, sustainability goals can seem overwhelming to small- and medium-sized associations, and these initiatives often get set aside in favor of more urgent tasks.

But at the top of every task list should be the question “Is this process/product/practice justifiable and sustainable?” Association executives should look beyond profits to ask this of everything the association does, because waste can drain the lifeblood from an operation.

At the heart of sustainable practices is the triple bottom line: planet, people, and profit. The National Association of REALTORS®’ Sustainability Program lists these three P’s as equally important strategic priorities in satisfying our associations’ economic, social, and environmental responsibilities.

Adopting sustainable practices doesn’t require a lot of economic resources, though; in fact, implementing best practices should save you money.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Simply making an effort to reduce, reuse, and recycle resources can do a lot to lower costs, protect the environment, and have a social impact. Ditching bottled water at meetings and events, recycling waste, updating computers rather than throwing them out, and refreshing the office environment and equipment with quality used furniture and fixtures are simple, low-cost steps that can save dollars and keep trash out of landfills.



An association’s value and success are measured by more than the dollars it brings in.

Utility companies often provide energy-saving programs that offer incentives such as free LED lightbulbs, testing to identify energy leaks, and discounts on water heaters and HVAC systems. Some energy companies offer free energy audits and recommendations on how to lower costs.

When our association began its “Greening the MLS” program 12 years ago, we paid for a blower door test and an energy audit. The results revealed we were venting heated and cooled air out of the building at a rate equivalent to leaving three exterior doors open! Remediation of our office’s windows, doors, and insulation lowered our natural gas bill 41% and our electric bill 26%—and that amounts to a significant amount of money in northern Michigan.

Energy conservation and waste reduction can improve an association’s bottom line in a meaningful way that makes operations more sustainable. All resources are ultimately finite, and the savings you realize mean that your

association can make more resources available to REALTORS® and elsewhere in the community.

Community Influencers

Once a small association begins its journey toward sustainability and resilience, the AE can apply that knowledge to member programs and community interaction. Armed with information learned through NAR’s sustainability program and GREEN designation, AEs and their members can wield a great deal of influence in the community.

When REALTORS® share knowledge about sustainable practices with clients, community leaders, faith-based organizations, and local elected officials, it not only brings sustainability to the forefront of your local real estate market but also elevates the perception of what REALTORS® can contribute to the discourse.

Small associations with limited resources can be major influencers when they include social responsibility and environmental strategies in their formula to support the planet, people, and profit. An association’s value and success are measured by more than the dollars it brings in; that calculation should include all contributions it makes to the health of the community.

For more information, visit the NAR Sustainability webpage: nar.realtor/sustainability. ■



Kimberly R. Pontius, CAE, RCE, GREEN, EPRO, is CEO of Aspire North REALTORS® and Northern Great Lakes REALTORS® MLS in

Traverse City, Michigan.

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Staying Power

Indiana REALTORS® CEO Karl Berron offers advice on engaging communities.

After working on state election campaigns, Karl Berron joined the staff of the Indiana Association of REALTORS® 33 years ago at the suggestion of a mentor—and never looked back. “IAR made the mistake of hiring and promoting me, and I’ve never been able to determine why,” he jokes with characteristic humility.

As CEO, Berron does a little bit of everything, with a particular focus on advocacy. Over the years, he has rebuilt the association’s culture, completed two major governance overhauls, led a coalition that brought landmark property tax reforms to Indiana, and acquired and renovated a headquarters building adjacent to the state Capitol.

Now that he’s ready to retire, Berron says he will miss the people most. “REALTORS® are amazing—smart, fun, and they do such good work for clients and their communities,” he says. “I’ll miss engaging with them.”

REALTOR® AE asked Berron about his long career and how he has been able to connect REALTORS® to their communities.

Q: What is the philosophy that drives your leadership?

Berron: Always remembering that the only reason we’re in business is to make our members’ business lives better. It’s their industry, and we’re spending their money. Our focus needs to remain on member needs and not the association’s parochial interests, which sometimes get in the way.

Q: How do you help members build their value proposition in the community?

Berron: Members are already heavily involved in their communities. Our job is to



support them with various resources: market data and industry research, financial support through IAR and NAR programs, and other tools. We also try to explain how their community involvement links to our advocacy efforts, since it’s central to our political success.

Q: What are some key elements of REALTOR® value you highlight?

Berron: Economic development is all about quality of life. REALTORS® understand QOL better than anyone; it’s what they sell every day. They also know housing, which is central to many of today’s policy debates. Finally, REALTORS® are one of the few local actors that have a regional focus, so the REALTOR® voice is a particularly important one on issues that extend beyond local political boundaries.

Q: What’s the biggest change you’ve witnessed since you launched your career?

Berron: The changing value proposition of members and associations that has

been driven by technology. Members have moved from a time when their market advantage came from having a monopoly on information to a time where information is ubiquitous. For associations, it’s the decoupling of the MLS that threatens the association’s “golden handcuffs.”

Q: What have you learned in your 33-year career that has helped you succeed?

Berron: The only asset associations have is our people—staff and volunteers. We have no secret recipes, no special equipment—just people. Attracting the best and brightest people is the most important role of an AE. If the right people are in the room, they’ll make the right decisions.

Q: What advice can you offer to new AEs who want to make an impact?

Berron: Become an expert in the industry you represent. Try to understand issues from the perspective of a member, not the association. Again, if our members succeed, we succeed, so do your best to listen to what they need, then try to provide it to them.

Q: What are your plans beyond retirement?

Berron: My only plan is to take six months to a year before committing to any new endeavors. So for now, it’s grueling things such as a Van Morrison concert in London’s Kew Gardens, some hikes in Europe, music festivals, and travels around the U.S. in our Airstream. And no email! ■



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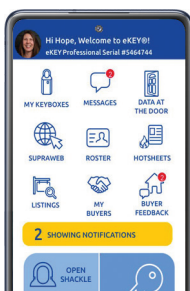
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