

The Colorado Springs BUSINESS JOURNAL

VOLUME 17, NUMBER 16

WWW.CSBJ.COM

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COMPANY

July 1, 2005



Since its formation in January, The Platinum Group Realtors has more than doubled its broker/agent census and has nearly doubled its assistant/administrative team.

Platinum Group draws top producers

By Becky Hurley

Staff Reporter

The vision of forming a real estate partnership without peer in the Pikes Peak region appears to have become a reality.

Eight brokers, all of whom were formerly affiliated with national franchises, formed The Platinum Group Realtors in January.

At the time, partner Mike MacGuire voiced confidence that the firm would "attract the most experienced brokers,

creating a level of real estate competence unparalleled in Colorado Springs."

Since its inception, the firm's broker/agent census has more than doubled to 40 and its agent assistant/administrative team has grown to 18 from a start-up number of 10.

Most of the brokers have come from offices affiliated with large national real estate corporations such as Re/Max, ERA Shields and Prudential

Partners in the venture included some

of the area's top producers: Ed Behr, Brent Demos, Frank Fanelli, Anne Marie Flynn, Steve Glisan, Mike MacGuire, Steve McFarlane and Dean Weissman.

Platinum's corporate approach, which as Weissman and Fanelli point out is similar to companies like The Group in Fort Collins, is to provide a productive work environment for high-powered real estate professionals.

Steve Kawulok, managing broker for one of The Group's seven northern

Colorado offices said his company's operating model has been in place for 29 years.

In 2004, the company's 250 brokers closed more than \$1.5 billion in real estate transactions.

"Our guiding philosophy is for all brokers to share in the business equally. We don't have a Top Producer of the Month or Top Listing Agent. Instead we offer an environment that tends to attract high producers who would like a voice in how their agency is run. As a result, we tend to be viewed as a unified team, working in concert – and our customers benefit from our depth of experience."

On the practical side, a brokerage owned by all agents means fewer assessments for overhead fees and services. Conversely, participating agents understand they will sacrifice a comfortable setting where many day-to-day financial and administrative functions were handled by a large franchise organization.

What drove the eight heavy hitters with 116 years combined experience, however, was the opportunity to establish a completely new – and more workable – business model.

Platinum's mission includes providing premier office space, top-quality administrative support and a continuous learning environment where professional skills and insights can be shared by top producers.

Gary Martinez, a former ERA Shields broker sold more than \$5 million worth of residential property in 2004. He joined Platinum in April and said the move was a good one, despite of the initial loss of his former company's strong nationally-supported relocation program.

"I made \$1.5 million in relocation

business alone last year at Shields, and was supported with excellent leads," Martinez said. "It was very comfortable and convenient, but I was ready to be more independent. Frank Fanelli has been a mentor to me during my three a-and-one-half years in the business and I felt fortunate to have this opportunity."

One of the pluses Martinez cites at Platinum is an environment dedicated to the success of each broker.

"We rent space, our commissions are 100 percent, and best of all, we receive education from other top producers on developing presentation skills, setting up our own Internet and Web site business and how to run our own business," he said. "My paychecks are bigger, but I've also had to track my own Pikes Peak Association of Realtors dues or other business expenses."

Fanelli earned recognition as one of ERA Shield's top three salespeople before leaving. "We all had positive experiences with our former brokers," Fanelli said. "We just felt we could do better on our own."

Weissman said his business matured to the point where 90 percent of his clients came from word of mouth advertising or referrals.

"Today I work with many move-up or high-end buyers," he said. "At a certain point, I realized that I no longer needed the safety and security of a national name to develop my business. Staying where I was, was actually going to make it hard to grow."

Newer Platinum brokers note the rising cost of national network referral fees and administrative expenses as one rea-

son for emigration to an independent local office.

"Unlike a national brokerage, our vision is less for quantity and more for quality," Weissman said. "We [the partners] met several times last fall to sort out how to develop our concept. We did plenty of due diligence and asked our attorneys and CPAs if we were missing anything. Financially, we funded The Platinum Group Realtors ourselves so we started out on a cash basis. It was a good move."

The partnership provides technical as well as administrative support.

Fanelli said that the office is equipped for high-speed Internet and wireless access, and the team credits Glisan for developing the company's smart technology infrastructure.

"The big companies are a great place for an agent to get started," Fanelli said. "It's also fine for the broker who enjoys the convenience of a full-service national affiliation. But we wanted to create an environment where highly motivated people can be passionate about what they do."

"We don't compete with each other, nor do we spend our resources supporting a big name," Weissman said. "We want to create a home for high producers and the response has been amazing."

Martinez agrees.

"Before, my managing broker passed on national relocation leads," he said. "Now it's up to me to build my own network. I've learned to use the Internet and have built my own Web site. It's already paying off. I've lost some leads, but now the ones I do get come directly to me."

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