

Fresh Faces

Enthusiasm. Excitement. Innovation. Tools. Those are some of the elements that Gen X and Gen Y bring to the real estate party. And real estate associations, from the local to national levels, have corralled that talent into chapters of the Young Professionals Network (YPN).

YPN, a networking and education group geared to practitioners under 40, is in a growth mode. California's 18 chapters, for instance, have 1,118 members and its membership grew by 244 percent in a 10-month period between 2009 and 2010. Generations whose opinions once were discounted in the corporate and real estate arenas (remember the old-school line about paying your dues?) now command respect.

They've also got clout.

After all, the under-40 crowd has the goods, many believe, to reinvigorate the real estate industry. Sheri Fejeran, for one, lavishes praise on South Bay Association of REALTORS® YPN members, calling them smart, creative, and goal-oriented. She also lauds their persistence, their command of technology, and a keen proclivity for building relationships.

Snapshots of several YPN members offer insight into the passion of young professionals and a sense of what they bring to the party.



Sheri Fejeran

RE/MAX Beach Cities Realty, Manhattan Beach



Tamara Suminski

RE/MAX Beach Cities Realty, Manhattan Beach



Mark Gonzales

Keller Williams, Encino

Flawless Service

Hotel guests expect a flawless experience. Delivering that seamless customer service was part of Tamara Suminski's job while working in hotel operations for a decade. Suminski, of RE/MAX Beach Cities Realty, Manhattan Beach, adapted that knowledge of impeccable customer service to the real estate business after getting licensed in 2004.

For instance, clients can access every scrap of paperwork on a transaction 24/7, thanks to the way she systematized her business to make the real estate process purr for sellers and buyers.

About entering the real estate business, the third-generation practitioner, who is South Bay Association of REALTORS® YPN chair, says, "It was inevitable that I crossed to the bright side. It's nice to wake up in the morning and like what you do."

Co-mentoring: Suminski sees a way for technology, yes technology, to bridge the generation gap, and points to a promising exchange she overheard between a YPN member and an industry veteran. It went like this: "I'll share some industry tips with you, if you'll help me use my BlackBerry® better." How's that for co-mentoring and closing the divide?

Operating in a tough economy: Young practitioners have an advantage because they don't know the good times, she believes. "The business has to be done differently and we bring a fresh spin, technology, and new ways of marketing," she says.

Shaping the future: "YPN gives young practitioners a platform and a way to be engaged in the industry," observes Suminski. She points to

Meet the YPNers and the future of real estate | By Elyse Umlauf-Garneau

being a sounding board for her local association's board of directors. "If they're looking for new technology to introduce to the membership, we're engaged in the process." YPN members often interview potential vendors and give their thumbs-up or thumbs-down. "We have a voice in influencing the industry as it evolves," she says.

YPN's value: "We get to be around some of the best and brightest and mingle with amazing dynamic REALTORS® from across the state. It's priceless," says Suminski. "We're grooming the next generation of leaders."

Path to American Dream

Mark Gonzales, of Keller Williams, Encino, recalls loving real estate even as he was growing up. For one, he saw what it could accomplish for new arrivals to this country, particularly family members who'd emigrated from the Philippines. "My family invested in real estate, and I saw how it helped them build a nest egg, provide money for new businesses, and change their lives. It led to the American dream," he recalls.

New-age farming: When he first started in the business, veterans asked about his client database. His response, "MySpace," raised eyebrows. To skeptics, he said, "I'm building relationships and friendships there. When those people are 30 years old, they'll be buying houses. It's farming on a more personal level," he observes.

YPN opportunities: He asks, "Would you be talking to me for a magazine story right now if I weren't in YPN?" That heightening of his profile is just one benefit of YPN participation. He's



Shannon King
*Schoolhouse Realty,
Solana Beach*



Jennifer Branchini
*Prudential California Realty,
Pleasanton*



James Dwiggins
*Realty World, Tracy
and C.A.R.'s YPN Chair*

also been able to meet high-level officers at the local, state, and national levels and says, "I never thought I'd be in a position to positively impact the industry on a greater scale. YPN provides tremendous opportunity to grow as a leader."

Don't diss us: Though Gonzales has had positive interactions with older generations, he senses that some still eye new licensees as short-termers in the business and people who must prove themselves before commanding respect. Gonzales, for one, intends to make real estate his long-term career. "Recruiters, especially, need to not only look at experience and production, but also find ways to evaluate a person's qualities and potential for success."

Prepped for tomorrow: "You have to be able to roll through the tough times with a good attitude and see the learning opportunity. These are trying times and it's the test for those who will treat this as a lifelong career," Gonzales observes. "If you can ride out this downturn, build and maintain relationships, and have a good reputation, you'll be the first one people will do business with when there's a higher level of sales and things boom again."

Natural Career Move

Shannon King was a go-to person for real estate advice well before she got licensed in 2000.

She started buying and rehabbing properties while living and teaching elementary school in Austin, Texas, and friends and family relied on her for advice about identifying opportunities, crunching numbers, and planning renovations.

Melding skills: King, a practitioner with

Schoolhouse Realty, Solana Beach, still relies on skills gained in teaching. A dose of psychology helps her manage clients' highs and lows. Negotiating stems from her experience with keeping peace in the classroom. And client education comes naturally. Moreover, a comfort with educational environments has helped her develop a marketing niche. She and business partner Gaby Preston volunteer in local schools and invite high school students to do internships with them. They also donate 10 percent of their earnings to local school programs. Relationships built in the education community likely will be a source of business.

Industry perks: "What I love the most is that the sky's the limit and there's no glass ceiling," she comments. Practitioners can set lofty goals and put in killer hours or they can opt for a gentler schedule. Moreover, the industry is such that monotony is kept at bay. "No day or transaction is the same," she says.

Constant learning: King particularly values YPN get-togethers with an education bent. The style is a departure from traditional classroom education and an ideal fit with Gen Y and Gen X learning styles. Members roam from table to table and learn one-on-one from those with first-hand experience in everything from luxury marketing to green design and video production.

Generation gap: Sure, King has experienced her share of veterans who have been condescending. But she's also seen a generous, guiding side. "People open up when they feel valued. We should reach out and ask other generations to mentor us," she says.

Business bump: Beyond giving members a sense of belonging, YPN also is a source for leads, King observes. She's landed five referrals from YPNers. Three have gotten to closings and two are on the way.



A contingent of YPNers recently visited the California Capitol and participated in Legislative Day 2010.

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—Shannon King

Set-up for Success

Jennifer Branchini of Prudential California Realty, Pleasanton, and Bay East Association of REALTORS® YPN chapter has a longer view of real estate than most of her contemporaries. She's been in real estate since high school when she worked as an assistant to a real estate practitioner. As a result, she's gained a level of comfort working across generations and immediately spotted the value of YPN membership

for all practitioners.

For one, there's the opportunity for cross-generational brain picking. "It's great to feel comfortable brainstorming about challenges you're facing," she says, noting that she's tapped seasoned agents over the years for insight and advice.

Passion during good, bad times: "Clients have made me passionate about the business and for getting people into the right area and home and watching them grow," comments Branchini.

Satisfaction also comes with the dark times.

One couple she'd helped with several transactions recently faced a short sale because of a serious illness. They apologized to Branchini about how little money she'd make on the transaction. Branchini said that the money was irrelevant and that she was grateful that she could help them through the process and ensure they weren't being taken advantage of. "It was a human transaction," she says, noting that full service to her means being there for clients in good and bad times.

Poised for the future: This is the best time for young practitioners to get involved in the business, she believes. Their leg-up: They're mastering the basics, developing a solid work ethic, and incorporating new technology platforms. "That will set them up for big success. If they're hungry

Community Commitment

YPN members also have a strong sense of community service. Various chapters around California have put on events to provide everything from shoes for needy children to funds for an organization that teaches values to kids. The C.A.R. Scholarship Foundation, a group that gives scholarships to California college students committed to real estate-related careers, is a favorite cause. For instance, South Bay Association of REALTORS® YPN has raised \$4,350 for the scholarship fund and is working toward \$10,000 for a perpetual fund for 2010, according to Tamara Suminski of RE/MAX Beach Cities Realty, Manhattan Beach.

and they work hard, there's no telling what they can do," she says.

Technological evolution: She's watched the industry evolve and loves the convenience and speed with which things now operate. "Last week I wrote and submitted an offer from my couch at home," she comments, while praising technological innovations, like DocuSign®.

Why get involved: "The knowledge and experience you gain are invaluable," she says. "It creates name recognition locally, provides an opportunity to influence the industry at the state level, and serves as a referral base."

Reshaping the Industry

James Dwiggins recalls hearing the word "escrow" at age five. After all, his grandfather and both parents worked in the real estate industry, so his life was steeped in the business. Today, it's not much different. His wife, Christine, and her parents are in the business, too.

As a chief strategy officer for Realty World, in Tracy, and as C.A.R.'s YPN Chair, Dwiggins is focused on gaining a bird's-eye view of the industry and configuring his company to best adapt to change and position it for success.

Youth power: "I was concerned about a lack of young people in this business," he comments. Given that a segment of buyers is under 35, he sees tremendous opportunity for practitioners to connect with and tap that demographic for business. At the broader level, he believes bringing in young practitioners is critical to the continuation and long-term success of the industry.

Leadership and political action: "When politicians make decisions, it affects every person's life in this business. One reason I got involved in leadership is because I wanted to know how decisions would affect me and my company," he says. Dwiggins believes that young practitioners should understand how the association operates and the way committee decisions shape the industry and affect legislative changes in both Sacramento and Washington.

"We need young people involved in committees," he says. "We have to groom them to take over leadership positions when people move out of them so that our work continues, there's continuity, and there are fresh blood and ideas."

Generational mentorship: All three generations can offer help to one another. For instance, Dwiggins would like to see existing C.A.R. directors mentoring young practitioners on the inner working of associations and preparing them for leadership. He'd like veterans to offer direction and school young people on trouble they may face during transactions so that the business isn't so much trial by fire for new practitioners.

Young practitioners can help older generations understand changing consumer behavior, the importance of sharing information, and strategies for developing Facebook business pages, blogs, and so forth.

"If we look at and use what each generation offers, we'll bring people together and there won't be such a big generational divide."

Future recruits: Bringing in new young people also is important in the long haul. "One of YPN's long-term visions is doing more community outreach at high schools and participating in college and university job fairs," Dwiggins comments.

Fresh Blood, Street Knowledge

A desire to tap Gen X and Gen Y energy and insight is precisely why Sheri Fejeran, a broker with RE/MAX Beach Cities Realty, Manhattan Beach, sought to establish a YPN chapter during her stint as 2009 president of the South Bay Association of REALTORS®.

Despite having a troop of dedicated, smart, and regular association volunteers, she believed YPN could add a fresh layer of innovation. "We were recycling the same people and the same ideas," she recalls. "It was time for some fresh blood."

Like all YPN groups, membership is open to all practitioners, meaning there's value
Continued on page 54