

This is the eleventh in a series of interviews focusing on important people in Santa Fe real estate. Evalyn Bemis is an owner/broker at Territorial Properties/City Different Realty.

Your company, Territorial, blended with City Different Realty last May.

This space (on Paseo de Peralta) was Territorial Properties and now it's both offices. It's me and several people from City Different: Jonathan Carleton, Nancy Fischer and Tori Warner Shepard. Claire Lange and Chan Osborn de Anaya have joined us since we came together.

When did you merge? Are you going to come up with a new name?

The change happened in May. We like both our names. Territorial began in 1989 and City Different was founded by Judy Arnold in the 1970s so the name recognition is important to all of us. We all share work and support each other. It does look slightly awkward in our ads with two names. Every once in while I throw out a new one. Maybe Big Deal Realty? The Independent Brokers' Network?

You were named Realtor of the Year for 2000.

I really am very touched and honored about that. It was a complete surprise. The former Realtor of the Year winners are the ones that choose and I have great admiration and respect for those people.

It was very funny at the Realtor of the Year dinner. My parents and cousins were there and I couldn't figure out why because I didn't know. Dennis Kensil and Jan Hamilton were there and Jonathan Carleton came over and complimented Jan on her lovely black dress and pearls. I had a nice dress, too, and I wondered why he didn't say anything but they were being so nonchalant. They didn't want to give it away.

I think the award was about community service and all the different committees I've served on with the Association. I've learned so much and about what a good bunch of people the Realtors are in Santa Fe.

I chaired the Grievance Committee and I now serve on the Professional Standards Committee and even there for the most part I've felt that sometimes people have gotten into trouble just by being careless or misinformed. It's rarely about anything unethical or malicious.

We have a Code of Ethics and when someone gets in trouble we try to make it educational all the way through, so people come out and are able to do a better job.

Where were you raised?

I grew up in the northeastern U.S., in Concord, Massachusetts. It's still a small town and we were able to make forts in the forest and play baseball and touch football in the street.

I got my degree in graphic design at Hampshire College (Amherst, Mass.) then I did a little exploration of the West. I took a three-month jaunt including seeing my Aunt Faith Bemis Meem, who was John Gaw Meem's wife. Uncle John drove me down to see Cristo Rey Church and that was exciting, in part because it was one of the last times he was allowed to drive. Faith took us to see Bandelier and it was so beautiful.

Were you interested in real estate when you first came here?

No, first I worked as a freelance graphic designer, then I was the director of the Armory for the Arts Theater, then I helped a friend in a business importing natural cosmetics from France.

I'd remodeled two houses and lucked out with both, so I wanted to learn more about real estate. The only classes were for people to get their licenses. There weren't a lot of people in real estate in those days and the reputation of Realtors was sort of poor. Once I had my license I'd meet people and when they asked me what I was doing, I'd say (she used a muffled voice) "real estate."

How long have you been a Realtor?

I got my license in 1983. I love real estate because it's never boring. Sometimes it's hard but it's always interesting. We started Territorial Properties 10 years ago and I'm now the sole owner. The fun thing is my partners and I have all been Realtor of the Year.

Are you married?

No. I have a boyfriend, David Blagg; his dad is a Realtor.

Do you use the Internet in your business?

I think I was the first one in Santa Fe to take a site at Realtor.com but it's pretty static. It is hard for a small office to do a better website. E-mail is the real benefit. The Internet has not been a great generator of business for me. If you're looking at Denver on Realtor.com you may have quite a selection but in Santa Fe there is no substitute for coming here. The neighborhoods differ so much, in or out of town.

The water situation is another difference.

We've had a pattern of prolonged drought every 30 to 40 years and people are very shortsighted about that when they rush out and put in big lawns or swimming pools. Even how beautifully they did those golf courses at Las Campanas, I still resent them. They don't belong here.

I think we have a duty to educate people about this: to understand where we're living.

So water issues should limit growth?

Yes, definitely. Even with what the city has instituted in the last few years to level off water consumption we can do a lot more. I think under the building codes you're allowed only very limited graywater use and we don't require people to have cisterns or try to do water catchment. I think we should be proactive about these things.

Our zoning ordinance that was adopted in 1981 was based on hydrologic zones and a lot of them were predicated on a 40-year depletion rate. So in Arroyo Hondo where I live if you divide below 20 acres you get water restrictions and even that is thinking that at the end of the 40 years we'd be out of water.

You're an equestrian.

Yes, I've been riding since I was 7. On my first ride the horse bucked me off and I thought that was great.

I have my horse, Tolstoy, and his younger brother, Teddy Roosevelt, at home and there is still a pretty wonderful network of trails. I enjoy three-day eventing. It's almost like endurance riding so to prepare for that sometimes I go on an hour-and-a-half trot so we cover a lot of territory. This year Tolstoy was the Area 10 advanced champion.

I could teach riding but that alone wouldn't be enough. In the same way, I love the real estate but if I couldn't get away and ride at the end of the day and not have to talk on the telephone I'd be a real sourpuss.

Do you have a specialty in real estate?

Naturally I know horse properties and what's available in the area. I'd say I do more rural properties than those in town. I've sold properties in Las Vegas and Nambé. I cover a big area.

You said you live in Arroyo Hondo?

I've been there for 17 years and I've been head of the neighborhood association the whole time.

If you look at housing inventory and building activity, it looks like a lot of people moving in and out of Santa Fe. How does that affect the market?

I think that's why we had our big real estate slumps. We had so many people come here who hadn't really spent time to really find out about Santa Fe. Maybe they had a fun vacation or they had friends who had come. Then they got involved in building their houses but after that they looked around and said, 'Now what do we do with ourselves?'

You mentioned slumps?

When people came here, first of all they built rather than buying existing homes so that inventory stayed on the market. Then they built and decided Santa Fe wasn't for them and left, so there was more.

I consider that we've been in a much healthier situation in the last two years. I think 1994-97 was a pretty painful time. A lot of people even quit trying to sell so there was all that demand that didn't come on the market. We also had a lot of negative publicity and we had a drought and huge forest fires. I'd say there was a lot of bad publicity about cultural tensions, and I don't know how much those tensions actually existed.

Do I dare say that Debbie Jaramillo was a very negative mayor? I don't mind at all her position on slowing down growth and that we should take a look at what we really want Santa Fe to be. Some of the things she stood for I supported. But her whole approach was always negative, never positive. She never said, 'How do we build something together?' She was always antagonistic. I think people suddenly were afraid if they came here of being treated as outsiders or being unwelcome and that hadn't been historically true.

Santa Fe also had been at such a peak before that as a top travel destination and you can't ride that forever.

I can get very grumpy when I see a new stoplight or a new, huge store but anytime I go anywhere else I see how really special this town is. Look at Old Pecos Trail when they did that widening. Everybody was so against it, I was against it, but they did a beautiful job.

How do you get your day-to-day fulfillment?

It is wonderful being able to find the right thing for clients. I have someone right now who's on a very limited budget and she has two old horses she wants to be able to keep at home. She came to me and said, 'This is probably impossible and you won't even want to work with me,' but we're right now hoping to put something under contract. You have to be persistent.

Something I've noticed in real estate, and it doesn't really matter if you have very little money or a huge amount of money, you have to be willing to compromise. It's just sort of the nature of the beast. You have to figure out the things that are really important to you and what are the things you can work around or do later.

What are your plans for the next 10 years?

Well, we have this property we're working on in Las Vegas that's sort of a wildlife refuge. It was very overgrazed and we're restoring it. That's fun. We have three beaver dams right now and it's very exciting to see what the beaver can do towards restoring the land. The reason they've come onto the property is that without the cattle grazing the riparian area is coming back so there's now material they can feed on and build dams with. But they don't distinguish between the native coyote willow and the cottonwood trees we've planted at great effort.

We also have porcupines and a little resident deer herd and red-tailed hawk nesting and we see raccoon tracks in the mud. We love taking the kids of family and friends down there and having them learn about the natural world. Last weekend I went with my sister's kids and we walked under one of the willow trees that had a great horned owl in it and that was so exciting.

What do you want to do with the company in next decade?

Really I'm very happy with the company as it is. We have no expansion plans. This is a wonderful way to do business, working with other independent brokers. I'm filling in for Jonathan right now and I love knowing that when I go off on a trip with the horses for a few days I have people I can trust to back me up.

There's a funny thing that happens in real estate, though. As soon as you leave everything picks up. You get a very big phone bill.

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