

# Past Days of Our Lives

Meet Realtors® who flew, jumped, poured, hiked and toyed in previous careers.

BY KEVIN FRITZ

Knowing how to mix the perfect martini or how to jump out of a plane just might qualify as the requisite background to launch a successful new career in real estate. According to Realtors® from Brooksville to Boca, the advantage lies not in what you used to do, but in how you use it.



Rich Cornelius  
Coldwell Banker  
Residential  
Clearwater

## Grounded in Tampa

When you're a pilot, it's pretty important to get it right the first time, otherwise—well there is no otherwise in a career where second chances are pretty much nonexistent. Rich Cornelius, a sales associate with Coldwell Banker Residential in Clearwater Beach, says he now uses that maxim to sell real estate after hanging up his wings more than three years ago when his employer went belly-up, so to speak.

He attributes his success in real estate to the life-sustaining lessons he learned by being in the air for four years. "I'm a problem solver," Cornelius says. "I mitigate things before they become big problems." Good thing.



Greg DePalma  
Century 21 Gavish Realty  
Brooksville

### Dive into a New Career

How many sales associates can say they've jumped out of a perfectly good helicopter over Russia with 39 other people? That distinction belongs to Greg DePalma, an 11-year real estate veteran, who was a worldwide skydiving instructor for 13 years.

DePalma, who works as a sales associate for Century 21 Gavish Realty in Brooksville, says it was teaching a 70-year-old Realtor® how to skydive that spawned his career change. "She told me I should be selling what I'm flying over," says DePalma, who has 8,865 successful jumps and no broken bones to his name [knock on wood].

His past life works wonders selling real estate. "I tell my customers I know real estate from the ground up!"



## Of Dolls and Homes

Having flown from Chicago to Hong Kong via San Francisco and Manila with a box full of six doll heads for a key meeting, and then lost his passport and arrived two days late, Chuck Sakolsky is amazed he lasted 35 years on the sales and marketing end of the toy industry, working for the likes of Mattel and Lionel Trains.

But for the past four years, Sakolsky has been having a ball marketing to potential buyers and sellers as an associate with Coldwell Banker in Boca Raton. "Real estate is not that difficult comparatively," he says. Indeed, he's woven his expertise in understanding the emotional connection between a child and a toy into handling the emotions of a seller. And yes, the doll heads did make it to Hong Kong in one piece—make that six.



Chuck Sakolsky,  
Coldwell Banker  
Boca Raton

"After 35 years in the toy industry, real estate is not that difficult comparatively."

—Chuck Sakolsky

## A 3/2 with a Wet Bar?

Whether you're looking for the quintessential adult beverage or the home of your dreams, Deborah Howard has the niche covered. In 2000, after spending 10 years mixing drinks and listening to customer's woes as a high-end bartender in Broward County, she decided to turn in her corkscrew for a career in real estate.

"I said to myself, 'Here's a career where I can make decent money and still model and act,'" says the aspiring actress and sales associate at Allstar Realty in Fort Lauderdale. And those days behind the bar paid off right away. In her first year, a former customer bought two homes. And the acting? Well, Howard recently appeared in the movie "Marley and Me," which starred Owen Wilson and Jennifer Aniston. Cheers!



Deborah Howard  
Allstar Realty  
Fort Lauderdale

"Here's a career where I can make decent money and still model and act"

—Deborah Howard, Allstar Realty

## Ecology Green to Realtor® Blue

Deborah Manz can tell you whether that conservation area that abuts a property will be a wonderful source of blue heron sightings or the future home of the dreaded pounding jackhammer. For 15 years, she was an environmental biologist from Tampa Bay who helped developers, the Army Corp of Engineers and others determine whether tracts were home to endangered species or had pos-

sible wetland impacts.

Manz was green before green was hip, but in 2004 she left it all behind. However, she didn't walk away from the knowledge. "It's helped me interpret surveys," says the sales associate with Century 21 Sunshine Realty in New Port Richey. "I'm totally comfortable looking at a survey, and I can speak confidently about it."

Whether you've worn the proverbial green thumb, sold toys to children or just about anything in between, it most likely offered experiences that you carried with you into your career in real estate. That's what makes you the salesperson you are today. Plus, you have all those cool stories to tell customers! 📖

Kevin Fritz is an Orlando-based freelance writer.



**GREAT IDEA** Former skydiving instructor Greg DePalma, Century 21 Gavish Realty in Brooksville, carries a photo of his skydiving mom that he shot when he took her on a jump. It's a great icebreaker, and it shows his attention to detail—not to mention the huge trust factor!



Only 5 percent of NAR members report real estate as their first career, and most bring expertise and experience from other fields.

Source: Data from the 2008 NAR Member Profile