

Lil 1 agent makes graceful shift from insurance to real estate



Sarah Johnson Real Estate: Real People

Real estate agents aren't just members of the local business community. They are your neighbors and members of your community. They also help build communities by helping people become homeowners. Each week, we are going to introduce you to local real estate agents—your neighbors—who are "Real People."

Cheryl Hilton is a full-time realtor at Century 21 Lil 1 Associates on Queen Street in Southington. She has been in the business for six years and on a recent afternoon in the bright conference room of the office, she had plenty to say about the career that she has chosen to make her livelihood.

Cheryl was in insurance for 15 years before pursuing a career in real estate. After she went to the

broker side of insurance, real estate became more and more interesting. When her youngest son was born, Cheryl was living in Southington and working in New York.

"Taking care of a toddler was hard," she said. "So I wanted to take a year or so off and while I did I decided I didn't want to stay in insurance. I thought, 'What skills do I have that I can transfer to something else?'"

Since insurance was a service industry, Cheryl had to build relationships with customers. And even though that job was on a larger scale, she still had to keep her clients happy. It was the same principle in the field of real estate sales.

"It's about doing what you say you'll do when you say you'll do it and following regulations. There are lots of regulations," she said.

Just because houses are involved in real estate transactions doesn't mean it's all about selling houses. Cheryl explained "We negotiate, we turn into therapists. When you settle with a realtor, it's like dating. It's intense and personal. You deal with clients' hopes and dreams and future, not to mention the significant amount of money being



SARAH JOHNSON

Cheryl Hilton in her offices at Century 21 Lil 1 Associates on Queen Street in Southington.

dealt with. You walk buyers through the process and get to the closing and then it's almost like you break up. You keep in touch but it's not the same." Cheryl shook her head.

She explained that selling and commercial transactions are a little more cut and dry than the buying process. Cheryl's career is never just simple transactions and business, though.

"Most days I love what

I do. That's rare and I love it. The flexibility is great. You work harder than in corporate but it's fun and people are funny. The things people say and do are unbelievable. You run into everything from naked people, to squatters, to clients who are a little left of center. Life is messy, we're human, we're flawed and it's beautiful."

Every success story is a good story but one that stood out for Cheryl was a first time buyer, an older grandmother who had been renting her home for 27 years.

"The hospital near her property was going to buy back the land for development so she got in touch with me. It was an interesting process because she was nervous; she had her adult daughter and grandkids living with her and ended up purchasing a colonial. Now she is happy. It was great to watch the transformation from her temporary situation to actually having something she owned. You could see her blossom. I watched her relationship with her family grow and evolve. I even still see her once in a while."

IN HER COMMUNITY

Cheryl believes that the fewer vacant homes there are in a community, the more vibrant the community is.

"I love matching people with communities that they want to live in."

Cheryl is involved in many community activities herself. She is president of the Urbin T. Kelley PTO, which takes a lot of time. She is also part of The Links, Incorporated in Waterbury. It is a social service organization of professional women that has been around for 60 years. There is a minimum of 48 hours of service to the area each year. Recently, they have worked on scholarships and a health fair in conjunction with the National Kidney Foundation.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT IN A HOME?

"I'm a very visual person," Cheryl said. "A place has to have the curb appeal. It needs to fit specific needs. In my case, I wanted all wood inside to counteract allergies. Knowing you are in the right place really is a feeling. You know when you walk in. When it comes to buying a home, I personally like new construction. Every home I've owned, I've built.

I enjoy the building process, picking everything out... but I can see the beauty in an older home too."

SOME WORDS FROM A (WISE) REALTOR

Not everything you see on TV is a good picture of what realtors say and do. "Stop watching those house hunting shows," Cheryl laughed. "And stop saying spacious. Just say big instead ... You're driving your agents insane. My motto is: I am here to facilitate your journey. Have fun with it. Don't forget that this is an awesome opportunity. Roll with it."

To contact Century 21 Lil 1 Associates and Cheryl Hilton, call 1-800-891-9990 or go to c21lil1.com.

Sarah Johnson is a correspondent with The Observer.

Are you interested in being featured in 'Real Estate: Real People,' call Mike Chaiken at (860) 628-6751 or email mchaiken@BristolObserver.com.



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