



LOUIE HOFFMAN 2017 REALTOR® OF THE YEAR

by Jaclyn Brandt, for The Bulletin Special Projects / photo by Kevin Prieto

Twenty-five years ago when Louie Hoffman got his start in real estate, Central Oregon was a very different place. At the time, much of the area was still dominated by large homesteads that had been established in the 19th and early 20th centuries, limiting the options for growth and development. Time brought change, however, and as a real estate agent, Hoffman has been instrumental in building the community into what it is today.

As such, the Central Oregon Association of REALTORS® (COAR) has selected Hoffman as the 2017 REALTOR® of the Year.

Hoffman moved to Bend in 1975 to be a ski instructor at Mt. Bachelor. Although he admits he wasn't the best skier out of those who applied, his mentor admired his "gift of gab," a character trait that led to four years on the slopes, during which time he met his wife, Lynn.

Hoffman settled in to Bend, working various jobs around the area during his early years, including a stint chopping firewood during the recession of 1981-1983. But eventually, he set his sights on developing a career. The masonry industry exploded after the recession, and Hoffman took advantage of the opportunity, spending the next seven years building custom fireplaces throughout the area.

But things changed in 1991, when he ruptured a disk in his back and had to rethink his future.

"My neurologist told me if I didn't quit, I'd probably be in a wheelchair in two years," recalled Hoffman, noting that at the time his children were 4 and 6 years old.

It was one day while an employee was out sick that Hoffman realized what it was he was supposed to do.

"I was 35 feet in the air all by myself at this job, and there was an ad on the radio ... they had seven more spots for real estate school," he said. "And I thought 'I could do that.'"

After completing real estate school, Hoffman started his career at Frank Ruegg Company, in a

nine-month training program. The program required a buy-in, and in turn provided training and a percentage of earnings from sales.

"My first nine months I made \$12,000 before taxes," Hoffman recalled, but quickly expressed his thankfulness for the experience that launched his career, despite the low earnings. "I had really good brokers and really great one-on-one training."

After a few years Hoffman moved to Steve Scott Realtors, and that is when his life changed — Hoffman made a deal that would shape the future of Bend.

Hoffman's involvement with the deal happened mostly by accident. A friend had asked him to look for five acres of industrial land to purchase as an investment. Hoffman decided to reach out to Jack Brinson, who, along with his mother Edna (Boyd) Brinson, maintained the family's 100-acre homestead, which had been established in the early 1900s and stretched from Empire Boulevard to Butler Market Road and all the way down to the river. It was Hoffman's hope that they would be willing to part with a five-acre parcel.

It was 1996 and the timing was serendipitous.

"[Jack] said, 'Well it's funny you called, I just listed it last night, the entire 100 acres,'" Hoffman recalled.

Hoffman's clients were not the only ones who submitted an offer for the land, but eventually the Brinsons opted to work with them to make a deal.

"Jack didn't want to deal with a suit, and we weren't wearing suits and ties, we were wearing jeans," Hoffman explained. "And we got the deal on Thanksgiving Eve. That was my home run in real estate."

They closed on the Brinson Homestead on June 4, 1997, and soon after sold and developed 87 lots — something especially impressive because Hoffman never thought he'd be working in commercial real estate.

"It was a blessing. Right place, right time, and knowing people," Hoffman said.

The deal gave Hoffman experience working in commercial real estate, although he continued working mostly in residential, the direction he continues today.

Hoffman's next step was with Fratzke Commercial, and then to RE/MAX, which is where he is now.

While he has volunteered at his church and within the greater community for decades, Hoffman has also dedicated himself to working with COAR. His early involvement with the association revealed the large separation between the residential and commercial real estate sectors, and he has been actively working to bridge that gap ever since.

Hoffman started attending the MLS meeting each week, was added to COAR's commercial investment division, and joined the COAR board as a commercial representative. Then, in 2015, he became president of the association.

During Hoffman's time on the board, COAR eliminated the commercial investment division in an attempt to bring the commercial and residential markets together.

"Louie [Hoffman] made us all see that we are all in this together and that we can work together," said Jaynee Beck, a principal broker with Keller Williams. "So because of him, now our commercial department is a part of the Central Oregon Association of Realtors, which they weren't in the past. And COAR got a national accreditation through the National Association of Realtors. Those are pretty rare, and Louie was very instrumental in making that happen."

Hoffman believed that it was important to bring together both sides of the industry, recognizing that it could strengthen relationships and make everyone better at what they do.

"We all have to have the same license. Everybody pays for COAR, so everybody now is entitled to come to the meetings," he said. "We brought them together, and I had some very big assistance from the staff. The standard of practice and the

education being offered is really helping the commercial sector. It worked, and they awarded me for it, because that is my legacy."

COAR's Realtor of the Year is given each year to an agent who making a difference in the field. Anyone can nominate someone for the award, and a committee of 11 COAR members review the nominees to choose a winner.

"[It is] continuing to do what you have done to get to that position, being involved and volunteering, and making sure that our industry is protected for the future," explained Beck, who is on the committee this year.

Beck was president of COAR in 2012, was last year's REALTOR® of the Year and has been a member of the organization for 25 years — the same amount of time she has known Hoffman.

"I am a huge Louie fan," she said. "He is just the most genuine, and in the ups and the downs, he is always the same person. He is wonderful."

Hoffman embraces the Bend lifestyle, and is enjoying watching his 5-year-old grandson learn to navigate the slopes of Mt. Bachelor, the very thing that drew him here so many years ago. The career that he set his sights on 25 years ago without ever looking back, once gave him the freedom to be there for his children, and now offers him the same freedom to be there for his grandson.

"I was able to block out time, make my appointments around taking my kids to school and picking them up," he said. "And now I'm doing it with my grandson."

Hoffman said he is "blown away" by the REALTOR® of the Year award, and plans to continue with the association for many more years. Beck, along with the other members of COAR, is looking forward to presenting Hoffman with the award, to honor his many years of service.

"Louie's birthday is April 2, mine is April 3, and I am crowning him as the new Realtor of the Year on April 4," Beck said. "So it is a good birthday present for him."