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broker/agent of the month

Neil Lyon

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"My wife is always behind my efforts and is understanding and supportive."

*by Beth Wadell * photography by Jim Leary*



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How does a good REALTOR® become a truly outstanding one? According to leading Santa Fe broker Neil Lyon, the answer is simple. "I'm not smarter than other people, I just work harder," he says. After 31 years in real estate, and almost 13 years in the Santa Fe market, Neil is confident and

focused, but every day he goes into work ready to push himself into making his business even better. "I'm always thinking about ways to be more effective, more efficient, more exposed," he says. And that makes all the difference. Neil is energetic, focused and results-oriented; in a single week he accomplishes more than many REALTORS® do in a quarter.


For example, Neil recently negotiated a multi-million dollar transaction, working with both buyer and seller. When other agents congratulated him he asked if he would be taking rest of the quarter off. Neil was surprised. "I can't even think that way," he says. "My plan is to go out and have a great celebration with my team and then go in the next day and get back to work."

It is not just hard work, it is focused work. As his associate broker Matt Desmond says, "It is incredible that Neil can do as much as he does with so much quality." Over the past few years, Neil has

narrowed down to just his core business of residential real estate, and he just keeps getting better. Thanks to his dream team of Matt and Vanessa Rios y Valles, everything is falling into place to make 2006 Neil's best year ever.

Neil got his work ethic straight from his father, Victor Lyon, who started a real estate company in Washington State in 1948. "He was a very strong role model," Neil says. Both Neil and his father had always assumed that Neil would follow his father into the business, and he earned his own REALTOR's® license in 1975, a month before graduating from high school. He worked part-time in the family-owned company every summer while attending the University of Oregon. He started off as a sales agent in the company, and he kept his eyes and ears open, picking up the language and flow of the business and watching the experts. In 1979, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in real estate finance and began working full-time.

After his father stepped aside as the company president, Neil took over in 1983. In 1986 the family sold the 10 office company to Coldwell Banker. With the experience of running his family's company under his belt, Neil moved to Boston to ultimately manage one of the largest real estate companies in the country. In 1993, Neil relocated to Santa Fe and served as President of Christopher Webster Real Estate. When the Webster's sold the company to Sotheby's International Real Estate in 1998, he stayed on as the senior vice president and managing broker.

A photograph showing three people sitting at a dark table in an office. On the left is a man in a light blue button-down shirt. In the center is a man in a dark suit jacket over a green shirt. On the right is a woman in a light-colored, textured sweater. They are all looking towards the camera. Behind them is a large window with a view of trees and a building. A bowl of snacks sits on the table in front of the man in the center.

"With Vanessa and Matt, I could take the business to a new level without any extra stress."

Meanwhile, Neil earned a number of professional designations, including Certified Real Estate Brokerage Manager (CRB), Certified Residential Specialist (CRS), and Graduate of the Real Estate Institute (GRI). From 1984 through 1997 he himself taught classes as a nationally recognized Senior Instructor for the CRB program.

At the same time Neil got involved in the Santa Fe Association of REALTORS®, which catapulted him to the center of the local real estate community. He served a three-year term as a director of the Association, and was recognized as the REALTOR® of the Year in 2001. He has also been involved in numerous local organizations such as the United Way, Kitchen Angels, Santa Fe Community Foundation, and the Buckaroo Ball.

Neil has always specialized in residences and building sites. Each year, 25 to 40 percent of Neil's business is in Las Campanas, but the rest of it is all over town. "I have no desire to service just one market and I don't want to be beholden to one particular market," Neil says. "I want to sell the best properties in town, regardless of the area." Working with this segment of the Santa Fe market is a challenge simply because so many of the properties he works with are absolutely unique and it requires a lot of expertise just to price them properly. That is also what makes Santa Fe so exciting for Neil—"it's definitely not a subdivision market!" he says.

By 2002, Neil decided to cut back on his office managerial responsibilities and focus solely on his personal brokerage business. That year, he stepped down as managing broker of Sotheby's International Realty. "I always knew that at some point I would want to focus exclusively on my own brokerage and do absolutely the best I could for my buyers and sellers, and the time had come," he says. In the years following, Neil fine tuned his strategy. The basics are simple: he just works hard, stays focused, is informed and knowledgeable, and

never wavers on ethical issues. It works. Last year, Neil completed 43 transactions, with the average single family home selling for \$1.4 million. Because some of his sales were land and condominiums, his total volume for last year came in just under \$42 million.

Part of the credit for last year's success also goes to the other two members of "Team Lyon:" Vanessa Rios y Valles and Matt Desmond. "Having a great staff is critical to my client's and my success, and I want to treat them in a way so they know that every day of the week," Neil insists.

As Neil's marketing and operations manager, Vanessa keeps track of all appointments, sets up showings, checks in with REALTORS®, and updates clients on progress with their properties; Neil calls her the office "air traffic controller." She also directs Neil's marketing and advertising.

Vanessa first joined Sotheby's International Realty as Head of Marketing for the entire Santa Fe office. When Sotheby's merged with French and French, Neil asked her to join his personal team in September of 2004. "I had been observing her diligence and technical savvy for a year and a half, but I never knew just how smart, dedicated and intuitive she would be—it was more than I could ever have imagined," says Neil.

As for Vanessa, she laughs, "I do just as much marketing now for Neil as I used to do for the entire Sotheby's office." She credits Neil for always coming up with new ideas, such as his recent push to create an individual website for each property. In June of 2005, Vanessa earned her own REALTOR's® license so she could better serve their clients.

Matt is Neil's "second pair of hands" out in the field. He started as a Realtor in the company's new agent division after earning his license

in the fall of 2005. Shortly thereafter, one of Neil's clients suggested that Neil consider Matt as a potential assistant. "When I met him, all I could think was, 'Why wouldn't I hire him right now?'" Neil explains. "He is extremely hard working, intelligent and dedicated, with incredible inherent skills and abilities.

"With Vanessa and Matt I could take the business to a new level without any extra stress," Neil says. Thanks to his team, Neil has done more business and delivered higher quality service than ever before. He is system-oriented and has established a clear process to shepherd each transaction to completion. Or, as Matt says, "Neil directs and orchestrates us so we can all provide better service." Together, they can accommodate client's needs better than any single REALTOR®. For example, if someone wants a last-minute showing, it is no problem to arrange it. "He can direct us to deal with whatever needs to be done and do whatever is most advantageous for the clients," Matt continues.

It's been rewarding in other ways, as well. "We have a great time—Vanessa and Matt are so qualified and eager to learn that I treat them as students as much as employees," Neil says. His goal is to keep the team together as long as he is in the business and then be able to pass on enough work to keep them busy for their entire careers.

Vanessa and Matt echo Neil's words. "It's been wonderful, just great," Vanessa exclaims. Both consider it an invaluable education. "It's a fabulous way to be learn about the business to be mentored by the best," Vanessa says. Matt concurs: "I chose to work with Neil instead of on my own because of his experience, success, and level of integrity. It's a great opportunity."

Vanessa adds, "I thought real estate would be more glamorous! From Neil I learned how important customer service is and how

much of the job is calling people back right away and doing the legwork for them."

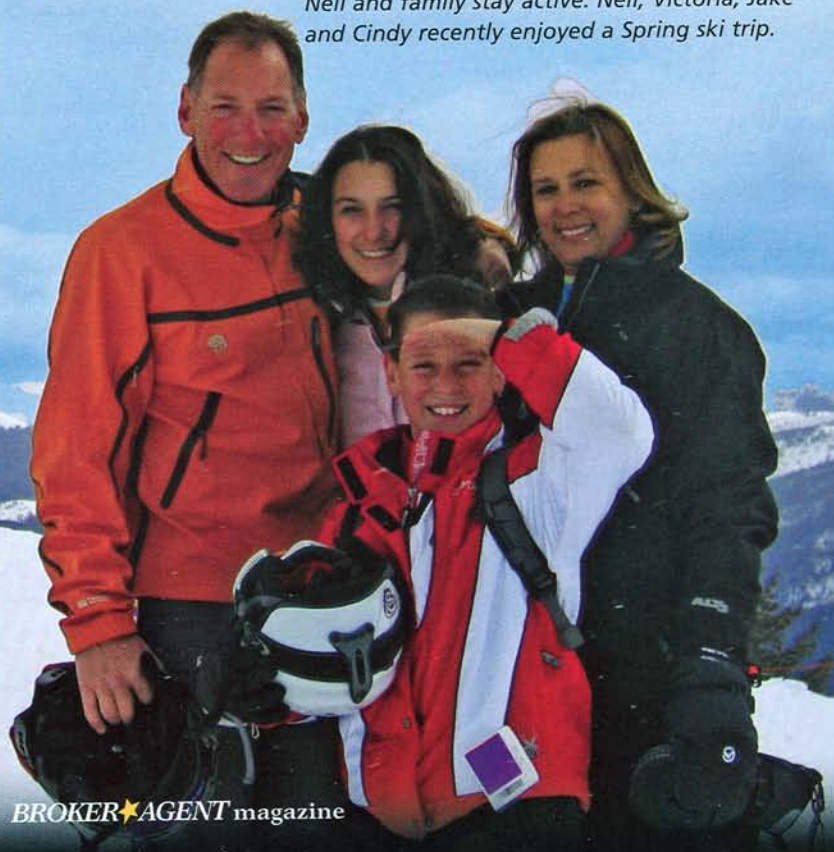
That is a good way of summing up Neil's philosophy. At the center of his business is, quite simply, a careful and conscientious attention to his clients' needs. He is responsive, available, and ethical in all of his interactions. "Working with Neil, I realized that it is not about money, it's more about looking out for the best interest of the client, and that's why people come back to him over and over again," Matt says. He notes that he has seen Neil pass up a transaction that a client was willing to close on because he did not think it was in the best interest of the buyer.

Neil's clients find him through a number of different ways. In addition to referrals from past clients, he also gets referrals from Realtors around the country, buyers from co-brokers in the market, and buyers and sellers from local business people. Thanks to the marketing spearheaded by Vanessa, he also attracts numerous clients through his various internet sites.

Who are these clients? Neil says, they are "who you would expect for his market segment: interesting and diverse." Many of them are national leaders in business and the arts. Interacting with these clients is a privilege and the most exciting part of the job. "I love being surrounded by people who are much smarter and more successful than I am. I learn so much and get paid in the process."

Another great privilege is being able to work with the other top REALTORS® of Santa Fe, an exceptional group of people. "The collegiality of our business in Santa Fe is amazing," he says. Recently, he went with several other top producing brokers from Santa Fe on a week long ski trip, something that would be unheard

Neil and family stay active. Neil, Victoria, Jake and Cindy recently enjoyed a Spring ski trip.



Neil recently announced that his beautiful home in Las Campanas was put on the market.



Neil D. Lyon

CRB, CRS, GRI

Direct: 505-954-5505 / Cell: 505-660-8600

Email: neil@neillyon.com

www.NeilLyon.com

of in the other markets Neil worked in. "Here in Santa Fe there is so much more business than any one of us can handle, so it doesn't have to be cutthroat," Neil explains. In fact, out-of-state buyers remark about how well Santa Fe REALTORS® work together. It is not uncommon for the other party's REALTOR® to congratulate someone on choosing such a great REALTOR® to work with. "I really appreciate that," Neil says.

Outside of work, Neil is just as focused. "Ninety-eight percent of my attention is spent on just three things: work, spending time with my family, and recreation," he says. His family consists Cindy, his wife of 18 years, and their two children: fifteen-year-old Victoria (named after Neil's father, Victor, who died shortly before her birth), and Jake, who is eleven. "I could not be prouder of all three of them," Neil states.

Neil is usually the first person in his office and often the last to leave, but he always makes sure he makes it home in time to eat dinner with his family every day. In turn, his family is supportive of his career. "My wife is always behind my efforts and is understanding and supportive," he says. "And my kids are so much more observant and knowledgeable about my business than I was at their ages." Victoria and Jake constantly ask questions about real estate. "My business is a big part of our lives and they recognize that it supports all that we do," says Neil.

When it comes to recreation, Neil has two major activities: skiing and mountain biking. The whole family skis together, but "they're all too smart to bike with me," Neil says, so he rides with good friends. Matt observes, "Neil plays as hard as he works. Neil gives 110

percent to his family, his business, and his skiing and biking. He is an incredible, well-rounded person who brings the same integrity to the rest of his life as he does to business." Matt adds, "I have learned as many life lessons as real estate lessons from working with him."

Matt is learning from the right teacher. Indeed, between fatherhood, a successful business, and occasional ski and biking trips, Neil's life is just the way he would like it. "I'm doing everything I want to do in my life. I'm a very fulfilled guy," Neil sums it up.

That does not mean that he is not still working to be a better broker. "I'm happy with my business, my productivity, the people I work with, but I am still always thinking how I can be a better employer, be more efficient, or improve our marketing," he says. At the core of his business is this continued desire to ratchet everything up, but now that he has the right team in place, everything is falling into place. "I am clear on my business and how to do it, and I have the right resources in place," he says.

Neil never really made the decision to enter the real estate field; it was just something that he and his family always assumed he would pursue. Yet Neil is very grateful for the opportunities it has brought him. Reflecting back, he says, "To spend time with interesting and successful people, help them realize their dreams and even get paid for it—what a great thing that is." ★

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