

By **KERRY MCGINLEY**
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It started as a monthly brainstorming session among friends. The small group of Realtors would gather to discuss the local housing market, better ways to serve customers and other real estate topics. Before long, the seven core members of that meeting of the minds decided to go into business for themselves as The Platinum Group. Just three years later, it's the highest-producing independent real estate company in Colorado Springs.

"Our rise as fast as we have is really attributed to the people who have joined our company, the people who took a risk with us to come out on a new venture," said Dean Weissman, one of the seven founding partners.

Weissman, Missy and Mike MacGuire, Ed Behr, Brent Demos, Anne Marie Flynn, Steve McFarlane, and Frank Fanelli comprise the team of partners who originally set out with about 15 agents. Today they have 70 licensed members of their firm that total more than 100 years of experience in the local real estate industry.

"We really have done little or no recruiting," Weissman said. "Top producers just decided to kind of get together. As people joined us, the word of mouth got to where we had agents approaching us. That's pretty rare in this industry. We're pretty flattered that our reputation and just the people that started joining us, it was kind of like a snowball that keeps getting bigger and bigger."

MacGuire says part of the attractiveness of their company to industry veterans is the team-oriented approach all agents share, which is an anomaly in the real estate profession.

"It's the attitude that successful people want to surround themselves with successful people – positive, like-minded individuals who want to help each other with better serving their clients," he said. "You would find that in the industry, typically agents will compete against one another within their own office. It never worked for us. We never wanted to do that."

The fact that each member encourages, supports and uplifts his or her co-workers is the foundation of the firm's success, Behr said.

"We all realize that no one agent is going to have 100 percent of the market share," he said. "But if we all pull together, that creates a synergy. Ultimately the customer benefits from that."

The firm apparently benefits as well. The team sold more than \$300 million last year, its second year in business. They're also proud that 12 of the top 100 agents ranked by sold volume in Colorado Springs are members of The Platinum Group.

"The success of this company is really because of the agents that are in here," MacGuire said. "The energy in here is so different from what we all

The Platinum Group

THE
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REALTORS

works for the gold standard

Ed Behr, broker/owner; Anne Marie Flynn, partner owner; Mike MacGuire, partner owner; Dean Weissman, partner owner; Brent Demos, partner owner; Steve McFarlane, partner owner; and Frank Fanelli, partner owner. Photo by Bill Sommer

came from."

Jeri Hendrix, one of the newer team members, agreed. She'd spent the first 12 years of her career at the same firm before joining The Platinum Group about 18 months ago. Despite the somewhat sluggish home sales market, last year was her best year ever.

"I don't do change easy. I just don't," she said, adding that it took Weissman a year to convince her to join the company. "After I got over here, I'm thinking, 'What took me so long?' They made me feel so welcome and made the transition so easy, everything fell into place. I didn't skip a beat. It was great."

Her new co-workers were also quick to offer ideas and advice on how to increase her sales and better serve customers, she said.

"If you do have a problem, (the partners) are the first to step in and help you. And not just them, the whole group," Hendrix said. "A big (advantage of working here) is the

camaraderie. People care if you're successful. Not just the management, we all care. The support is unbelievable."

Support at the top trickles down to the customers, the partners agreed.

"It's really not about a one-time

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commission, it's about the relationship," Weissman said. "It's about the same level of service no matter what the price point is. We give every individual the utmost care regardless of price."

Dedication to top-notch customer service is paying off in the long-term, MacGuire said. He's now working with the grown children of clients he worked with years ago.

"I think for most of us, a lot of our clients end up being very close friends because of the service we provide and

the relationship you build with your clients," Behr said. "It automatically transitions into a friendship, too."

In addition to lifelong relationships with clients, the partners pride themselves on staying abreast of cutting-edge technology and

innovative ways to improve customer service. In a profession where 80 percent of agents leave the business within two years, the veterans know diligent work and long hours are job requirements.

"There is no magic bullet in real estate," MacGuire said. "The agents here know that there isn't one. This is a high-service, high-communication, hard-working business. We're going to continue to grow our company and grow our market share and find new and better ways to improve relationships with clients."

Part of providing excellent service includes educating clients and, at times, being brutally honest about the price and selling potential of a home, they said. The Internet has proved to

be an invaluable tool for clients when it comes to researching the local housing market. It's helping to create smarter consumers who know how to ferret out less scrupulous agents and find top firms.

"There are Realtors and companies out there that would prefer to keep customers in the dark. (Clients) are well-educated now, and I think that's awesome," MacGuire said. "I'd rather people have more information. This is probably the single largest investment they'll ever make in their life. They better be educated on that."

Education is also crucial for Realtors, Weissman said. It's a building block of the foundation that enabled The Platinum Group to enjoy a 30 percent increase in sales last year, despite a slow market.

"The market has changed more in the last 18 months than I've seen in the last 15 years," he said. "It's having the resources literally at our fingertips to make sure we are educating ourselves and being very proactive in what's happening in the market place as opposed to being reactive to what's happening in the market. Hopefully we're one step ahead."

For more information on The Platinum Group, go to www.platinumhomesales.com. ■