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Written by **Lauren Young**
Photography by
Katherin Frankovic

Caryn Prall & Pete Economos

E to P GROUP: BUILT BY AGENTS FOR AGENTS

“Today, we are preparing our agents for road bumps that may appear in the future because of economic fluctuations and uncertainty,” says Caryn Prall, operator of several Keller Williams offices in the western suburbs. “The one sitting back and not driving will struggle with the changes that lie ahead.”

Caryn and her business partner, Pete Economos, met in 2014 while both were operating separate Keller Williams locations, Caryn in Denver and Pete in Illinois. The two joined forces in 2015 when Caryn became Team Leader of the Naperville office that Pete had purchased in 2010. Ever since, they have considered it their number one job to create opportunities for their team, E to P Group.

“Working together has truly been a blessing,” says Caryn. “Pete is very different from me when it comes to be-

havioral strengths. Before partnering, we interviewed each other and our spouses to ensure the four of us were aligned and on the same page about everything. Both Pete and I desired a balanced life for our families, so it was an important step for us at the very beginning.”

Both agents come from real estate families in Wheaton. Pete’s mom and dad were REALTORS®, and Caryn’s mom was a REALTOR® for 44 years in Wheaton and Glen Ellyn. While their parents worked for different agencies, they always had great respect for each other.



...



Caryn & Joel
at their farm with
grandchildren
Bryn, 11 months,
and Weston, 4.

@realproducers



The Economos family, left to right: Meghan, 16, Billy, 12, Cate, Anthony, 12, Pete, and Nick, 18.

“In addition to real estate, our backgrounds include entrepreneurial families. Pete was raised in a family where his father, grandparents, and other family were serial entrepreneurs. They always owned their own businesses,” explains Pete. “I worked for a top restaurant company in Chicago when I was just out of college, and after two years I realized I wanted to spend more time with my family, so I too got into real estate. Caryn also worked in a nationally-acclaimed restaurant company for 13 years in Columbus, Ohio, so there are some amazing similarities to the background there as well.

Caryn’s husband Joel is also an entrepreneur who owns

and operates a hemp farm and extraction company. “He left the corporate world and started this new adventure,” says Caryn. “At Keller Williams, we are always talking about giving opportunities for others to do what they want to do. If I hadn’t turned my own opportunities into reality, he wouldn’t have made the choice to leave his corporate job. Through what I’ve done at Keller Williams, he believed he could turn his dream into reality! It truly has been a life-changing blessing.”

Pete is known as the numbers person. He preaches current market and statistics to educate the REALTORS® so they can relate to their clients every day,

which has been a game-changer for their team. Educating their agents has always been a guiding principle for their offices, to help them be better agents and stand above the expectations of the industry.

“We arm our agents with data so they can be an economist with their clients,” says Caryn. “The general public has a lot of information, but they don’t always know how to discern and grasp it. Our agents separate themselves because they know the story behind the property and understand the market at a deeper level. Our agents have in-depth consultations with clients to help them make good decisions on what to do

in today’s market. We also focus on agent profitability through expense management and abundant additional income opportunities.”

Over the last five years, Pete and Caryn’s team has grown from 129 to over 900. Real Trends named them the #2 Fastest-Growing Real Estate Company in the country.

In 2015, they were presented with the opportunity to purchase the Keller Williams in Glen Ellyn. In 2016, they launched Downers Grove. In 2018, they purchased the St. Charles location and moved it to Geneva. In 2019 they opened the Plainfield location and most recently, an office

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“ Culture and who we are in business with really matters.”



“ We push to bring more and more value to our people and will continue to do so, no matter what.”

was launched in Aurora. Elgin is next on their list and they just signed an agreement to partner with four other Keller Williams locations in the area to align with shared services and build bigger opportunities. “Our goal is to thrive, not just survive,” explains Caryn.

For Caryn and Pete, building a thriving business means also creating opportunities with partners outside of simply selling real estate. Beyond selling houses, Caryn and Pete try to support other REALTORS® by helping them become business owners, whether it’s owning a market center or investing in a title company or other affiliate business.

“It is really important for us to support our local agents,” says Caryn. “Culture and who we are in business with really

matters. We’ve partnered with over 125 other local Keller Williams REALTORS® and encouraged them to create other affiliate businesses where they have ownership. I do fundraising for local organizations and am on the Board of Directors of DuPage Legal Aid Foundation. Getting service to people in need is key.”

Each year in May around the world, all Keller Williams offices shut down for a volunteer day. They have the most volunteer hours in the world with over 155,000 REALTORS®. “Recently, our agents cleaned up The Riverwalk and parks in Naperville. In the past, we’ve hosted proms at senior living centers and helped with landscaping at veterans’ homes and a single moms’ house in Downers Grove. This past year, we raised money in mar-

ket centers to aid grocery store and healthcare workers. It’s our favorite day of the year,” exclaims Caryn.

Outside of work, both Pete and Caryn love spending time with their families. Pete and Cate, his high school best friend and wife of 21 years, have four kids, Nick, 18; Meghan, 16; Billy, 12; and Anthony, 12. Pete makes it his goal to never miss one of his kids’ sports games. “There could be between three and five games on a weekend,” says Pete. “I’m always chasing my kids around, and I refuse to miss one.” They frequently travel to Michigan for boating and to the mountains to ski.

Caryn enjoys being active and playing tennis. “We have a farm in Oklahoma with horses and a shelter for stray dogs.

The dogs get to roam our 100 acres, and we love giving a home to them,” says Caryn. “I have three bonus daughters, a son in law, and two grandkids that light me up. I’ve been married to Joel for 10 years and the kids call me ‘Glamma’ because they think I’m too young to be a grandmother. I would agree.”

As Caryn and Pete look at how to prepare for what the rest of 2020 has in store, they remember their original vision from 2015.

“Our model is geared around being the most agent-centric market in all we do,” says Caryn. “We are built by agents for agents and take it very seriously. Pete and I do what we do for growth and expansion. We push to bring more and more value to our people and will continue to do so, no matter what.”

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The Fisher family, left to right: Cole, Randi, Carol, Bruce, and Robert



partner spotlight

Written by **Lauren Young**
Photography by **Katherin Frankovic**

bought a home inspection franchise, which helped us get up and running,” says Carol. “But the franchise went under in our first year due to a huge lawsuit so we continued on our own, putting all the pieces together as we went along. Over 30 years later and here we are!”

The shock of the first year and franchisor’s failure became a hidden blessing, allowing them the freedom and independence to take their business to new heights. With more income, they were able to pour funds back into their business and grow it to where it is today. “It wasn’t that hard to grow back then, because there wasn’t much competition,” explains Carol.

The Fishers’ past in construction is an invaluable resource. Referrals for inspections continue to come back to them because of the excellence of their work and depth of their expertise. “With all the knowledge and integrity we’ve developed over the years, we know exactly what to look for to diagnose the problems in a home,” says Carol.

That legacy will continue with the next generation, as Bruce and Carol’s three children have become involved in the family business. Robert is the Inspection Manager; Cole is the Operations Manager; and the youngest, Randi, is starting to help in marketing. “I’m not quite sure how they all ended up in the business, but they did!” laughs Carol. “We all work hard together.”

The family has taken many group trips over the years, and enjoy visiting national parks and scenic locations. Visits to Disney parks are in regular rotation since industry conventions are frequently hosted nearby.

Outside of the day-to-day business, Carol is active in many real estate and home inspection associations, including Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS®; Three Rivers Association of REALTORS®; Northern Illinois Commercial Association of REALTORS®; Women’s Council of REALTORS®; National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals; and Association of South Asian Real Estate Professionals. Bruce is a certified member of the International Association of Certified Home Inspections (InterNACHI); Exterior Design Institute (EDI); and American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI).

“It’s obvious that I enjoy being involved in the industry,” says Carol. “I’m on several committees, and I like the growth, idea generation, and community that takes place. One can always find me with my ‘White Glove’ on, a wave and smile everywhere I go as part of our branding and recognition.”

For White Glove Building Inspections, their focus has always been providing clients honest, thorough, high-quality, and comprehensive inspection services. Their range of offerings require a



white glove BUILDING INSPECTIONS

Legacy Gets the White Glove Treatment

It takes more than one hand to count the professional carpenters in the families of Bruce and Carol Fisher. For generations on both sides, a passion for woodworking craftsmanship has carried through from grandfathers and fathers to brothers, cousins, and uncles. That same meticulous perfectionism makes for great home inspectors and is the backbone for the success of the Fishers’ White Glove Building Inspections.

Bruce met Carol in college on a blind date set up by a mutual friend after he served in the Navy for some years. Not surprisingly, after both Carol and Bruce studied at NIU, he pursued a career as a carpenter and builder. “After we got married, Bruce knew he wanted to run his own business,” says Carol. “With my interior design degree, I did work on architectural renderings and interior design construction drawings. We started our own construction company that designed and remodeled homes. Each project was a blend of both our strengths.”

Eventually, they were introduced to building inspections, a profession that had just emerged. The new industry felt like a good fit for Bruce’s background and skills in construction. “Originally we



The family with Jillian and Angela, who keep the office running



team of qualified inspectors to serve all timeframes, home types, and testing needs. Additional services include radon testing, mold testing, VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds), EIFS (Exterior Insulating Finishing System) inspections, also better known as the synthetic stucco Dryvit™, as well as thermal imaging.

Another service of White Glove that is unique to the inspection industry is commercial inspections because most companies only do residential. Over the years a wide variety of property types have been inspected, including strip malls, churches, office buildings, industrial warehouses, and restaurants, and all within the ASTM Standards.

White Glove recently added a new service called White Glove. SignTracker.com, a real estate sign installation service. "It's unique because REALTORS® can order sign installations, riders, brochure boxes, and removal of signs all online, and

we keep track of their sign inventory so they are ready to go from our storage facility," explains Carol. "You can order and watch the whole process through our website. We also order J.U.L.I.E. to ensure our installations never interfere with underground utilities. Then we top it off with a photo to the REALTOR® as proof of installation."

As White Glove Building Inspections looks forward to the remainder of 2020 and the industry, they've made adjustments to accommodate their homeowner and REALTOR® partners. "We're now offering virtual inspections when requested," says Carol. "We talk with the homeowner over live video, or we can send them videos throughout the inspection with a follow-up phone call. It's just one of the many ways we're making the process more accessible, safe, client-friendly, and time-saving during this unprecedented time."

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JEFF STAINER

» cover story



Brittany and Jeff with Naperville developer Nick Stanitz, who trusts Jeff to market his upscale homes

ROCK 'N ROLLIN' REALTOR®

Written by **Lauren Young**
Photography by **Katherin Frankovic**

During his 13-year career as an entrepreneur, Jeff Stainer learned what is really important to customers: expertise and availability. He opened, owned, and operated Pro-Am Music, a 10,000 square-foot, full-service musical instrument store in Darien, Illinois. He had long-dreamed of being a business owner, which is why he chose to obtain his accounting degree from Northern Illinois University prior to pursuing his dream.

Jeff was able to manage the retail store and add on wholesaling as he became the U.S. distributor for Trace Elliot Amplification. Trace Elliot had over 160 major endorsees, including Garth Brooks, Fleetwood Mac, and Aerosmith. Over the years, he

met and partnered with Dennis DeYoung from Styx, Jim Peterik from Survivor, as well as his in-house music instructors and rising stars Joel Hoekstra, now with Whitesnake, and Cathy Richardson, now the lead vocalist for Jefferson Starship.

One fateful day, he was talking to Gary Jacklin, one of his regular customers about the 16-hour days and the traveling required for trade shows. “Gary kept coming into the store to buy microphones for his church and always talked about real estate,” remembers Jeff. “He thought that my dedication to my customers would serve me well in the real estate industry, and provide some much-needed flexibility for my growing family. I also considered the opportunity to help others have a better buying and selling experience than what I had witnessed in the past; so I sold the business in 2002, and pursued a career as a real estate agent.”

Jeff began his real estate career using the same philosophy that had brought him success in his previous career: Learn as much as possible about your craft, and be accessible to answer your clients’ questions and concerns whenever they arise. Jeff understands that buying a house is a huge purchase, and each client deserves a complete picture of the process, from the first meeting until the day of the close.

“I became a real estate agent because I thought that I could make the process less stressful for my clients,” says Jeff. “If I do my job well, everything else will follow. Of course, that includes being knowledgeable about the homes’ structural and aesthetic properties, and by treating all clients with the respect that they deserve. If I provide my clients with honest feedback, I feel they will have a higher level of comfort about their informed decision.”



Jeff's pride and joy, left to right: daughter Sydney, son Tyler, daughter-in-law Katie (Ryan's wife), son Ryan, and wife Carla



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Jeff with teammate and Buyer's Agent REALTOR® Brittany Bollinger

Jeff hit the ground running. He began winning awards at RE/MAX after only one year in the industry. He attributes his early success to his background running his own business, his ability to keep up with market trends, and skills as a negotiator.

"I knew going in that being a REALTOR® is just like any other business," says Jeff. "You have to run it like a business, invest in your brand, promote well, and overdeliver for your customers. Selling and buying a home is not just about the 'eye candy' in the home. It's about knowing and considering the pros and cons of the location, floor plan, school system, etc. It's important to openly discuss all of these aspects of home-buying with the clients, so that a 'dream home' doesn't become a disappointment down the line."

As his volume of clients grew, Jeff knew that he wanted to continue to be available for all of his clients' needs. He added a talented REALTOR®, Brittany Bollinger, to the team to assist buyers in finding their dream homes. She is cheerful, hard-working, and eager to help, adding dimension to the team.

Jeff is a recipient of the RE/MAX Chairman Club Award and eight-time Five-Star Award winner. He has ranked eighth in individual performance in Northern Illinois with RE/MAX, in the top 1% of all RE/MAX brokers in Northern Illinois, and top 1% of 1.4 million licensed real estate professionals in the U.S. Real Trends Magazine awarded him Top 10 Agent in Illinois for exceptional service, and he was one of the first in Naperville to



focus on the luxury market. The 2019 Broker Agent Advisor 7-Star Award and CLHMS and Guild Recognition from the Institute for Luxury Home Marketing followed.

Jeff met his wife Carla when they were 17 years old, while he was working as a cashier at Jewel. Since then, their family has grown to include Ryan, 30; Tyler, 26; and Sydney, 18. While downtime is rare, Jeff and his family try to carve out a week every year for an annual trip to Atlantis Paradise Island, where Jeff and Carla have been vacationing since going there on their honeymoon. These annual trips provide an opportunity to reconnect with immediate and

extended family for fun in the sun and sand. For some quiet time, Jeff likes to venture to Canada for some peaceful fishing with fabulous views.

Other passions for Jeff include supporting many causes, including the Children's Miracle Network through RE/MAX. He is also active with the American Cancer Society, and helped build houses with Habitat for Humanity. Locally, Jeff volunteers at Galaxy Soccer Club of Naperville, Center Stage Theater, and community schools.

Even though he has found better work-life balance as a REALTOR, he still prioritizes a strong work ethic. While most people turn off their phones at

dinner time, Jeff keeps his on, and takes calls at 6am or 11pm. His goal is to be the client's first phone call when they have a problem, and always does his best to answer the phone immediately. From paperwork to inspections, negotiation to closings, Jeff is present to oversee the process, using attention to detail to ensure that there are no unwanted surprises along the way.

"The only thing that I don't do is put the post in the ground," laughs Jeff. "At the closing, most of my clients will say that it didn't even feel like they were selling a home, and was much less stressful than anticipated. I hope that by being knowledgeable and accessible, my clients understand how dedicated I am to providing a stress-free, smooth transaction, from the beginning to the end."

@properties

JANET MARINIS

▶▶ realtor® feature

Written by **Lauren Young**
Photography by **Katherin Frankovic**

LIVE AND LEARN

(AND LEARN,

AND LEARN...)



“I have learned that in this business, the sky’s the limit,” says Janet Marinis. Confident ambition and a lifelong appetite for learning have served her well in her current career as a REALTOR®, and at steps along the way.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree from Marquette University, she split time as a dental hygienist and independent real estate agent, both part-time, for many years. The flexibility of both schedules allowed her to raise two boys from her family’s home in Western Springs.

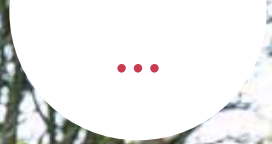
In 2012, when her boys were approaching their teenage years, Janet joined Baird & Warner in La Grange. Her new manager and mentor saw something in her from the beginning. During an early coaching session, he told her something that would change everything: that she had the potential to earn a six-figure income within two years. “I didn’t think it was possible as

a single mom at the time with 12- and 14-year-old boys,” said Janet. “But I was motivated to make it happen.”

After about a year, she had become the top producer in her office. In 2014 she became a full-time REALTOR®, and in 2017 she hit her goal of \$20 million in volume during a 12-month period. “That confirmed that this is the career for me!” she says.

Since then, Janet has received many awards, including a 5-Star Agent rating in 2018, 2019, and 2020 from Five Star Professional and Chicago Magazine, plus numerous other recognitions. Her passion for learning has led to additional certifications and training to build her expertise. She’s a Certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist (CLHMS), Certified Negotiation Consultant (CNC), Certified Staging Consultant (CSC), and a Pricing Strategy Advisor (PSA).





Janet with sons Nicolas (left) and George (right)

“I love to learn and am very technology-oriented,” explains Janet. “This industry is always changing, and I like to stay on top of what is new. Marketing is one of my biggest strengths, and I’ve used research to implement the latest technology for listings.”

When not researching new tech or showing real estate, Janet and her husband, Tim Olsen, enjoy staying active, traveling, and sharing a love for luxury cars. Tim owns Olsen Motorsports in Downers Grove, an automotive business specializing in Porsche. Together they attend car shows and events on the weekends, traveling around Chicagoland to see rare and exceptional vehicles. They also work with a professional trainer and prioritize exercise into their schedule.

“Tim and I just bought a new house in Hinsdale and are in the process of a complete renovation,” says Janet. “We started researching at the Merchandise Mart for cool ideas and designs. This year we are focused on the kitchen and master bathroom. We love the ‘before and after’ process of it all!”

Janet and Tim have a second home in Naples, Florida, and they plan small getaways throughout the year. “I plan to obtain my real estate license in Florida,” says Janet. “I’m looking forward to being able to help snowbirds since so many are looking for a vacation home now.”

Janet has been blessed with a thriving business that continues to grow each day. “I am thankful for all my friends,



Tim and Janet enjoying the haven of their Hinsdale backyard

family, and clients that have supported me in my career,” she says. “Most of my business now is from past client referrals and repeat customers. Nothing gives me greater pleasure.”

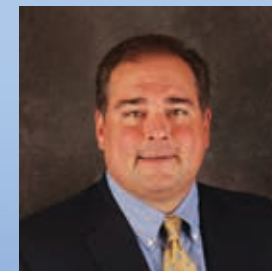
As Janet looks forward to the rest of 2020, she’s making extra effort to reach out to past and present clients. “A lot of people have had financial challenges, and I’m just trying to call or send a note letting them know I am thinking of them,” she says. “It makes a big difference to stay in touch, and for people to know someone has their back.”

Janet is someone you can count on to look after your best interests with stellar customer service. She is professional, respected, and trustworthy. Her close attention to customer service and responsiveness is a carry-over from her previous career in the healthcare field. “I don’t want my clients to get lost within a big team or agency. They get all my focus and attention. Buying and selling is one of the most stressful things that can happen in life, and I want to be there to help get them through it.”

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