

leadership

Q&A with Melvin Broadous, President, Portland Metropolitan Association of Realtors

What does your appointment as President of the Portland Metropolitan Association of Realtors mean to you?

Being the first person of color to head the organization means a lot. I've been a broker since 1992, and been a member of the realtor association. I've been involved in association governance for sometime. Over the years, colleagues and members have told me that I'm on track to run the organization.

The realtor association operates under a very strict code of ethics. It is my goal to highlight that, and let the public know that they are protected under the representation of member realtors.

Why is it important to emphasize the value of realtor representation?

Realtors bring tremendous value to real estate transactions. For the buying and selling public, I believe there is some disconnect in understanding the value of real estate representation. I want to bring that back to the table. Every real estate transaction should have professional representation.

As we all know, if a person needed to go to court, without question, that person would go to court with counsel. When it comes to the most significant investment in most people's lives, often the buyer or seller tries to wing it. Sellers try to sell homes by themselves, and buyers will often contact folks and try to negotiate transactions by themselves. When a transaction hits a snag, realtors are often asked to review completed transactions, by then it's too late.

PMAR is encouraging the buying and selling public to seek representation from the start. This helps ensure that transactions progress smoothly, and that their interest in the transaction is well-represented by a seasoned realtor.

You've been involved with the Portland Housing Center for sometime. Why are the services of the Portland Housing Center important to local residents?

The work and dedication of Portland Housing Center have really humbled me. I see their passion for their work, and reaching the organization's goals. We've seen some success as a result of reorganizing PHC a few years ago. We have changed the curriculum used by prospective homeowners to "Homebuying 101," by NeighborWorks America. It's a quick-and easy introduction to basics of homeownership for students; truly a great tool.

Some lenders have made that homebuying course a part of their funding requirements. It's important that buyers understand the process of homeownership. We go through specifics of interest rates and different types of loans that are available. It's important for first-time homebuyers to gain a basic but solid understanding of what they can expect during the homebuying process.

I am saddened that some community organizations are not utilizing the services. I see other organizations that have similar initiatives that seem to want to duplicate services offered by the Portland Housing Center.

Getting agencies with common goals to work together is the most effective way to approach homeownership in our region. If we have more collaboration, our dollars will be better spent, and we'll get more effective results. We'll see a reduction in the homeownership gap between whites and people of color.



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QUOTABLES

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How does your work impact communities of color in our area?

PMAR has made huge strides in reaching out to the various cultures of color, through its [Homeownership Opportunities Committee](#). In collaboration with homeownership development organizations, this committee is designed to identify and develop opportunities for association members to help buyers own homes. PMAR works closely with as many organizations as possible, such as HUD, Portland Housing Center, HOST Development, Fair Housing Council of Oregon and others. As an example, this committee has a forum of community organizations.

While our members don't intend to violate housing laws, sometimes language included in a flyer – intended to enhance marketability of a property – might very well come real close to a fair housing violation. Examples are "good family home" or "mother in-law quarters." Those kinds of language can be questionable. By being very specific about who can live in a home, such marketing language can be very discriminatory. The key is to describe the *property* and NOT people in the marketing information.

Working with the Fair Housing Council of Oregon and Housing and Urban Development, PMAR came up with an automated system through which realtor members can police themselves, to avoid potentially discriminatory marketing language. It has been a really good working relationship, the kind of collaboration that we encourage in the entire industry.

How did you get into the field of real estate?

I owned an automobile parts business. I was driving around most of the time, from Eugene to Sandy, to parts of the Oregon Coast. I was always in my truck, delivering filters to automobile repair shops. I started that business from scratch, and it grew into a pretty successful business.

As a single parent of four small kids, I made the decision to find a career where I could be home with children. I wanted to raise them by myself. That meant that I needed to sell my business or do something different. The only career path that I could think of that would give me a chance to own my own time was real estate.

Within a couple of months since making that decision, I had sold my business, gotten in to real estate school, and was home everyday at 3:30. My youngest at the time was 5 years old, and my oldest was 13. It was pretty challenging.

When you were starting out, what were some of the challenges?

The company that I started with didn't take on real estate agents with less than eight years' experience – I had none. I knew the manager, because our kids went to the same school. He has always told me that if I should want to get into the real estate business, I should give him a call. When my personal situation came up a year later, I talked to him, and he kept his promise. To this day, I'm still in the same office with Bill Brewer. Bill has been one of the most valued assets to my business ever since. I would not be where I am today without him, and for that, I love him like a brother.

What do you attribute your success to?

Our family is made up of a long line of entrepreneurs. My father was a barber and freelance photographer. My uncle owned a gas station and an automobile detail shop. We have pastors in the family. Our family has always been self-sufficient, and that's the example I grew up with.

True story: I never learned how to swim. During summers, my friends went to swimming lessons at the YMCA on Saturdays. Every Saturday morning at 6:30 a.m., I went to the barbershop with my Dad. We opened at 7 am, and I was there all day. My duties were sweeping hair after each cut and shining shoes. On the side, I also had a lawn-mowing business in the neighborhood.

I worked at the barbershop all of grade school and a couple of years in high school. My Dad would take the money that I made every Saturday. On average, I made \$65-\$75, and my Dad would take most of it, and leave me with \$3. He did that for years. My friends used to tell me that I was being "played." I started to feel bad about it.

When I was a junior in high school, I told my Dad that I wanted to buy a car. He told me to go down to the NAACP credit union, and tell them that I wanted to get a loan to buy the car. When I went down there, the lady behind the counter told me that I had \$6,500 in the bank. My Dad had been saving money for me all those years, and I had no clue. I didn't take the money, and they gave me a loan to buy my car against the funds that I had. That's how I established my first piece of credit.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

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My Dad and my brother are both gone, and I'm most proud that I'm able to take care of my Mom. She turns 80 this year. Years ago, I bought the house I grew up in. That's where my Mom lives. I paid off all her debts, and she pays nothing to live.

Each year that goes by, I get more proud of that. I see what it has done for her. She is as happy as I've ever seen her. She is worry-free. She does what she wants to do. She grew up during the Depression, so she's very frugal.

I'm really proud of my Mom. She's a pay-it-forward kind of person. To this day, she has a weekly route where she drops off donated bread from the grocery store to take them to homeless shelters. She's an amazing woman.

What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

Helping people accomplish their goals. Working in real estate, people tell me what they want, and I figure out how to make it happen. Oftentimes, it's a matter of negotiating a contract. What I find most fulfilling about my work is putting the keys in the buyer's hand at closing.

Why is paying forward important to you?

Success should be measured not only by how much we earn, but by how much we give away. That mindset will change this world.

I've been in New Orleans several times, with the Portland Housing Center and the National Association of Realtors, and also worked with Habitat for Humanity providing a new home for a family there. Seeing the devastation after the storm was an eye-opening experience. People living there at the time went through so much. Their lives were completely changed overnight.

On Dr. Martin Luther King Day last year, the Portland Metropolitan Association of Realtors through Habitat for Humanity, built a home earmarked for a family in Louisiana. We built the walls locally, then shipped them over to Louisiana, where they are assembled. It was good to be involved in that project.

What's on your wish list?

I'm a happy person, and I step back from things that threaten my happiness. Family and friends are most important, and I genuinely love everyone who is in my circle. My wish is to continue to be happy, and to continue to grow my circle. I want those I come into contact with to be happy too. What matters past that? Life is good!

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