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Success in bad times: Robin Sue Kaiserman is picky about homes, clients

By Ed Egger
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In 33 years in the residential real estate business, Robin Sue Kaiserman has had a lot of good years. But 2007 was the best year ever.

In fact, Kaiserman was Tucson's top producer in combined new and resale homes, selling \$57.3 million. The average price of the home she sold was \$881,832.

Kaiserman is a Long Realty Company agent who works out of the company's office at 5683 N. Swan Road.

How did she do so well in the down year of 2007?

Kaiserman says there a number of factors.

For starters she says she won't tell a client something just to try to get the sale. She says she doesn't need the job and as a result clients get some blunt advice about what they need to sell their property.

"For 35 years, I've been married to a rocket scientist with a very good job," Kaiserman said. "I was fortunate. I have never had to put food on the table. To be successful at sales, you have to really not be hungry."

Another factor in her success is specialization. Kaiserman doesn't sell all kinds of houses in all kinds of neighborhoods. Her territory is the Catalina Foothills, Oro Valley and northwest — but only as far west as Foothills Mall — and the University of Arizona area in central Tucson.

"It's really important to know your product intimately," Kaiserman said.

For example, she said if a client is consulting her about listing a home she wants to be able to tell them on the spot what the listing price should be. And she doesn't need a map to find the homes she helps her clients buy and sell.

"If I don't know where your house is, I shouldn't be a Realtor," Kaiserman said.

She also believes it's important to know the market and the inventory in that market. Kaiserman said she "works in the trenches" every day so she's aware of what's happening in her markets.

"The market changes every week, depending on what's going on," she said. "I don't work at home — I always work in the office so I can see what the synergy is, how many agents are around and how much the phone is ringing."

But Kaiserman isn't a workaholic. She says she has created a comfortable balance between her personal life and her work life. With two grown children and a grandchild, she became the efficient multi-tasker most moms must become.

She quotes an old saying that nobody on their death bed ever wished they'd put in more hours of work.

Before going into real estate, Kaiserman worked in Kaiserman Men's Store, which was owned by her husband's family until it was closed in 1986.

More recently she has helped her 28-year-old son Jeff and his partner Stephen Ochoa find locations for their retail business, Frost, a Gelato Shoppe, which opened in Casas Adobes Plaza in 2005 and earlier this year opened a second location at Tanque Verde Place across from Udall Park.

Kaiserman says she has three rules about the houses and the clients she works with:

1. "I have to like the house and its floor plan."
2. "The seller and I have to agree on the price. If they're unrealistic, there's no reason to work with them."
3. "The seller and I have to like each other. You're sort of married to this person for a while. You have to be able to say, 'I'm not here to hurt your feelings, but you need to open those blinds — it's too dark in here!'"



And she can be adamant when it comes to what sellers need to do to market their home, from telling them they need to replace the carpet, buy new bedding or put away the knick knacks.

"It's sort of like going to your doctor when he tells you what you need to do to stay healthy — you may not like it, but somebody has to tell you the truth," she said.

Not surprisingly, Kaiserman says 90 percent of her business comes through referrals. Some of the houses she sells have been sold by her two or three times before, and she said it's not unusual for sellers to keep coming back to her.

But Kaiserman also believes in marketing. "I spend a fortune on marketing," she said.

She sends her buyers, especially those from out of town, to her website - www.rob-insue.com. That is a time-saver, she says, because it allows buyers to narrow their choices before it's time to go out and look at homes. Kaiserman doesn't offer 'virtual tours' online because they're poor quality and only "make the viewer dizzy."

One reason Kaiserman may be doing so well in the down economy is that the year she started in real estate, 1986, was also a bad year with mortgage interest rates at 18 percent.

Whatever may be happening elsewhere, Kaiserman believes Tucson is more insulated. She says the large employers — Raytheon, the University of Arizona and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base - aren't as vulnerable to economic cycles. And the climate will continue to attract people, especially for second homes.

"I've seen Tucson grow from nothing and I don't see why it won't continue to grow," Kaiserman said.

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